ZOË THE DANCER

IDA WILD



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THE DANCER

BY IDA WILD

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PREFACE

FASHION or no, we mean to have a Preface, and to present ourselves with due courtesy to the Reader, that ubiquitous personage whom we observe, spasmodically taking sips at the fountain of thought.

Life here presents her surprises, to which you are heartily welcome. Religion and bigotry sport in wild extravagance on the same page. Vulgarity, among other venial sins, exists unchecked, but vice is most aptly and thoroughly reproved. Comedy trips behind tragedy, and the greater passions jumble the less in undignified procession. A gentle mean is preserved, and if the humour be held to be not excessively diverting, it must also be conceded that the tragic passages are not of the blackest. If the Devil pipes his way in, on occasion, pen and ink speedily overcome him, and a page at most is his pasturage—further he may not wander; the good lies beyond; or it may be the indifferent-good: human nature, not mawkishly virtuous, is our plea, which, having made, we plunge you straightway into the story, to find your own feet, our bow achieved.

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ZOË THE DANCER

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CHAPTER I

proves beyond argument that a conventual training does not always predispose to a religious vocation

A DESK in form of a pulpit, but with this improvement, that the steps were collapsible, and could be pulled up out of harm's way once you were safely ensconced, stood in the centre of the hall, and in it sat the supervising Sister. She kept an eye on the girls, in spite of her prayers, dividing her attention skilfully between God and Mammon, in the form of her board and lodging, dependent on her care of the girls in playtime.

It poured with rain: the ugly bricked playground rang with the splash of water. One hardy Sister and one of the servants chopped the earth open in the three-feet wide circles left unbricked round the gaunt trees, and swept the water with hard brooms into the cracks. A smell of damp dust pervaded the place; a dust that was obviously insoluble lay in lines on the wet paving and clung to clogs and brooms. Green-painted iron tables and chairs darkened as the rain polished them: the pink bricks shone brightly; the white walls of the convent glistened in the unremitting shower.

The Sister in charge had already exercised her authority so far as to confiscate a novel. This book she now vainly tried to read, but as it was in English, and the good woman was ignorant of that language, she progressed slowly, slipping past all the small words and seizing avidly on those of Latin derivation. The result was discouraging; after an exhaustive examination of the steel engraving that rested beneath a strip of silver-tissue paper at the beginning of the book, she closed the volume definitely, assured that it was unfit to be read by her maidens. The engraving that led to this decision showed a handsome man with a remarkable growth of hair on his face, such as in that day young gentlemen affected, embracing a ringleted and brazen damsel. Trees on a knoll at an enormous distance from them on the right, and infinitesimal deer on the left, suggested that their mutual clasp was being effected in a park, presumably from the area portrayed with great clarity of detail, under some other sky than that which had smiled on the author's nativity. Sister Joy closed the book with a snap, locked it in the drawer of her pulpit and took up her prayer.

A group of small girls in black frocks scampered noisily at one end of the hall; they had invented a new form of "touch," which necessitated climbing over, under, and through the benches: they had drawn half-a-dozen of these, each long enough to hold twelve girls, out from the wall and arranged them in a hexagon, seats inside, the narrow board which served for back outside. Regardless of the Sister's cries, they clambered and tumbled over this barricade, wildly

shrieking, rolling on top of each other. At times their end of the hall presented nothing but a cloud of dust and innumerable white, black or striped legs waving without respect to pairs in a confused mass of drapery. The owners of these sturdy limbs cared for the Sister not at all; she was vinegary, unlovable. They let her mingle her angry shouts with theirs unheeding: they were sure of their exemption from attack. Often before she had climbed out of her pulpit to come upon them, when one of them would scurry along, take away the steps, and leave her stranded on their level. She had learnt to stay in her castle, and they safely kept to the end of the room.

A sedate group sat near the pulpit and dressed dolls: they talked all at once and very loudly, but their behaviour was beautiful. Sister Joy watched them with satisfaction. She could not hear in the general hurly-burly the sundry choice remarks and similes applied to her by these black-frocked bees. The Sister's nose was ill-shapen and over-tinted: it may be said at once that she was temperate of necessity, as she would have been of choice, had choice been hers, but the coarse mind of girlhood had rebaptised her *Brandy*. This name, with uncomplimentary epithets and vulgar qualifications, formed the basis of an alphabetical game the children were playing.

At the other end of the room sat half-a-dozen young ladies, their demure air and elegant pose giving them the look of widows in their black dresses; one sewed, another held wool for a third to wind; they talked quietly. The vigilant Sister could see nothing in their behaviour to suspect: their very innocence

had, some fifteen minutes earlier, brought her out of her throne, rigid with suspicion. She had then carried off the novel, which a polyglot damsel was translating currently to her five companions. They were now discussing love affairs, in which branch of knowledge all were admirably proficient.

Lalage, ravisher of men's hearts, was exceedingly broad; she possessed more bulk than any other boarder or day-girl at St Nytouche's. Her black eyes glowed beneath a heavy brow, her hair stood fuzzily out about her large head; she fingered a crucifix that lay on her bosom, half closed her eyes and murmured in a rich deep voice of the ideal lover. The others chimed in, the subject has attractions for every age at any time: in a girls' school, among the nearly-finished damsels, what else is there to talk about?

The bilinguist, whose volume had been reft from her, sat now with slender neck bent over a piece of embroidery; she added her quotum to the discussion, though apparently she had had very little chance of studying the subject personally. Fourteen years had passed since she had been brought to the convent at the age of four, and she had remained there, school-time and holiday-time since. Never had she issued from its doors without at least two Sisters in attendance; never had she had speech with man, save with the elderly proprietors of the shops patronised by her holy instructresses; yet she knew what flirtation was and that from experience. A beneficent code commands that, when in public, Sisters shall lower their eyes: they are bound to obey; their vows ensure it,

their pupils are bidden to do likewise. It has been observed, however, by the dispassionate (from which class the male student of all times and subjects is excluded, together with every other young man), that the young ladies on whom this injunction is laid disregard it sometimes. It has been idly added that they infringe it always, but every disinterested person must testify that such is not the case. What! would you have us believe that limpid-eyed coquettes of eighteen never look down? The suggestion is dismissed as ridiculous and malignant.

Zoë, the linguist, therefore, sometimes obeying the behest of her tutresses and sometimes ignoring it, had qualified for the present discussion with marked success. It were vain to ask of us how such things are done, but her name was known and breathed in more than one students' boarding-house, with sentimental sigh. Her pale beauty, her undeveloped slimness, her straw-coloured hair, distinguished her among the buxom girls who made up the rest of the school. Precocious development is the lot of the Belgian girl; the French one is not behind her in this respect; Zoë was the only representative of Great Britain within St Nytouche's walls. Her willowy form, which laid her open to the charge of scragginess from the envious and indiscriminating, marked her as English in a land where our womenfolk are held in disdain. Not that Zoë was held in disdain; her lack of flesh was not uncomely, she did not exaggerate her angles—for, in spite of her thinness, she was not angular. Her bones did not protrude at shoulder or at knee; she was slight-framed; every joint was delicately clad

with enough tissue to soften without concealing it. Her bosom was not incurved; the vaguest roundness saved her from the reproach of a flat chest; she understood the art of draping her scant black bodice to make the most of her charm. Among the fleshy damsels of St Nytouche's she moved with an air of refinement. Arguing that her appearance was more genteel than that of the others, we arrive at the conclusion that refinement in perfection is reserved for human skeletons, the rare gentry that we pay threepence to gaze on curiously at fair-time. Our premises must be faulty. The admirers of Zoë's pale slenderness did not argue on these lines: they accepted her inconsiderable girth as a beauty and were content to sigh its fascination from a discreet distance.

These six damsels, four stout, one enormous, and Zoë, spoke then of love. They talked of it every day, on every possible occasion: no two of them could be together without bringing it under discussion, but not one of them had ever been in love. Blench, students! hide your hirsute faces, junior clerks! You are not loved. Your deities, for all their tender play of eyelids, for all their changing colour (or for all your own, for that matter, when you become kaleidoscopic at their approach), your deities, we repeat, are like all other deities: they consent simply to be adored. Girls of eighteen cannot love, they would not if they could: they prefer their freedom.

Of these six beauties, one was a bank manager's only daughter, and had been tacitly affianced, since her eleventh birthday, to an under-sized youth of the town,

son to a paper-manufacturer. She knew him very well, his faults, his unsightliness, his vulgarity; she had no liking for him whatever, she cared for him too little to despise him, yet she contemplated her union with him unflinchingly. She would have set more store on him had he been one of the be-whiskered medical students that sighed melodiously as she marched past in line with fifty-nine others: but she dismissed, wisely, his personality from the calculation; she foresaw herself as a moneyed lady, with carriage, country-house, servants in plenty and a drawing-room wax-candled and glass-sconced out of all proportion, and the prevision gave her peace.

Another was to go North to her relatives, Dutch every one of them, at the end of the term; she hoped to be speedily engaged and married. Her hope was to be realised. The Fates held a tea-merchant, yellow and amorous, in their hands for her: she did not foresee her life as a female Bashaw, or contemplate a high commercial position in the Dutch Indies, yet when such a lot was offered her she accepted it blithely.

Four of the six were helping to populate Europe or Asia within five years. Everyone, except Zoë, on this occasion was prefiguring her marriage, her dowry, her social position, her husband, definitely sure, each one, that marriage was to be her lot. Zoë alone, though holding her own creditably, had no anticipation of her married life. She could imagine far happier fates than that. She turned the marriage state over in her mind as the girls chatted: it was no whit alluring. She dismissed it firmly and took up the text of

Love. That amused her, in its initial stages. We may do her the credit to assume that she wished to pursue it no further. She listened deferentially to Lalage's contented sighings and Claire's wistful murmurs.

Sister Joy watched vainly, suspicion in every wrinkle of her plain face; the damsels were entirely well behaved; their look modest, their occupation ladylike; Sister Joy thought of the engraving and formed her own estimate. She realised that the screaming monkeys in their improvised corral at the other end of the hall were at less harm than their elders. She sighed for the peace that was to come to her in two day's time, when Lalage and Claire, Théodorine, Marie and Paula, should each be gone her way for good and all. Zoë, she knew, stayed to vex her yet another year. At the remembrance, she sighed afresh.

A bell rang, three times three; one hundred shell-like ears heard the sound, Sister Joy heard it also. She gathered up her rosary and hours, set down her steps, and clambered out of her pulpit; three times three meant "Sister Superior wants Sister Joy." Every one of the seventeen teaching Sisters had a separate combination of rings on the bell. The hardy Sister had run out again into the shower to sound that particular one on the large bell that hung above the chapel door. Sister Joy flung an exhortative remark from the door of the room: it fell on barren ground; to obviate being locked out on her return, a not-unknown event, she took the precaution of locking her flock in. Little they cared: the screech of the

mighty key would warn them infallibly of Brandy's coming, which her felt slippers would never do. Having thus been disposed of, the flock set itself to real amusement.

The rain spattered the windows: its presence exempted the occupants of the hall from outside supervision. The seventeen teaching Sisters slept after their substantial dinner. Our six rose. Wool and embroidery were dropped, unruly scamps from the end of the room were warned to come no nearer (they obeyed the big girls, because they worshipped them from afar and because they were pretty), and dresses and hair examined by the aid of a small hand-glass produced from Théodorine's ample bosom.

Mademoiselle Claire Marie-Paul de Farée Burmance, anno ætatis suæ 19—and you may imagine with what deference she was treated—had been presented: had trod in voluminous and costly attire the royal floor, had sunk to the lowest position possible, except the recumbent, before her sovereigns, and had been graciously allowed to resume the perpendicular, a permission of which she had most elegantly availed herself. Alas for such grandeur! Miss Claire had, for some girlish misdemeanour, been sent unceremoniously back to school for a year. It is to be questioned whether it was better to be at school in the unassailable position of a *presented* personage, and therefore first, or to join the real circle of privileged courtiers as a mere unit. Each has its advantages. Claire was undeniably the most revered of all the girls at St Nytouche's: she took precedence, even in the Sisters' eyes. That is already something.

Zoë had early learnt from this englamoured friend to exploit the conventional courtesy with grace: her tutor sank not more flowingly, nor rose with greater ease. Those were the days of draped hips; the smallest tots strutted fashionably, their nether limbs disguised beneath yards of ill-placed stuff; the bunchy skirts lent greatly to the majesty of the courtesy: down you went and your exaggerated hips stood out about your waist, so that it looked all the trimmer, and after carefully shuffling your feet, back and up you came, your drapery falling ludicrously into its place. Such garments, even on Zoë the willowy, were ungainly in the extreme. Monsters were truly seen when fifty females went out together.

Down went Zoë and up again before an applauding and envious circle of girls. Claire, the presented one, became princess, queen, empress, or Lalage, the black-eyed ravisher of young men's hearts; and all in turn dipped, tripped and skipped themselves giddy. The middle-school, not quite children, and certainly not entirely women, made a ring, applauded, screamed, sighed, laughed, oh'd and ah'd. Belgian lungs are powerful. Zoë stationed an alert child at the door: tumult was abroad; every child roared aloud for very wickedness. Down and up went the young ladies, all delightfully serious, wearing a faint smile, deferential and pleased, the epitome of polite enjoyment as described by the curve of the lip. Nothing more feminine in the way of employment surely could ever have been evolved. Even the shrill-voiced tom-boys from the corral came rushing along to watch, practised gravely in corners.

One, two, three and up, swish goes your skirt, one, two, three and up.

In their quarters the twenty-two working Sisters washed dinner-plates, scrubbed floors, mended robes, ironed and clear-starched their head-bands. Sister Constancy polished the inside of the refectory window; a burly servant rubbed the outside.

"Oh for a man," sighed Sister Constancy.

"Eh!" shrilled the servant.

"A man," repeated the Sister.

The servant gaped in involuntary dumbness. She knew the feeling, none better; but that a Sister should express it!

"To clean the windows," said Sister Constancy, unsuspectingly. The servant rubbed away, not entirely satisfied. It was, on the face of it, such a vain desire that the explanation sounded poor. Besides, it came so late. No man helped with the work of St Nytouche's, and no one knew that more surely than Sister Constancy. Since her assumption of the black veil at the age of twenty she had toiled at the floors, saucepans and windows of the school. In the forthcoming holiday hers it would be to repaper the refectory, whiten the ceiling and plane the floor. The Sisters of St Nytouche held themselves aloof from dealings with men; they proved the equality, if not the supremacy, of their own sex by doctoring each other, killing each other that way at times, and, in the past, by burying each other. Such friendly attention was forbidden by man-made laws of later date. Philosophically, the Sisters accepted the new state; after

demise men might dispose of them, but prior to that date they should assert their independence of masculine help. Man's work lay outside the massy walls; within femina reigned. Married ladies themselves, mothers of the pupils, got no farther than the ground-floor, even at party-times. Above that common footing, vestals only might mount; none other trod the saint-adorned corridors of the upper storeys; maiden eyes, unread in love, looked only forth from gabled windows.

At party-times, thrice in a year, gentlemen were admitted: masculine hats hung in the tiled hall, and men were led securely guarded by Sisters along the icy corridor to the hall where the misses were courtesying a while ago, and at the close of the entertainment were marched back, still in custody, to their headgear, obliged to assume it, and sent off. Affability was the tone, but the gyves were there. These monsters to be so courageously guarded were relatives of the young ladies, and though they came with their mammas and grandmammas, yea, with their wives some of them, they were not to be trusted. Sister Superior saw to that; geniality incarnate, she received every one at the door of the hall, after his skilful pilotage by the plainer Sisters through billows of white muslin and frilled cashmere, and placed him in safe anchorage in a male quarter of the hall. Mutual protection you may agree with Sister Superior in supposing it; if the damsels were saved, how much also had the youths (ay, and grey-beards) escaped! Still, a man—by which you are to understand what is masculine between fifteen and thirty—a man has eyes, and the mere sight

of beauty is refreshing. You sigh from afar, but you have seen and you have, O joy (O Sister Joy, we might meanly interpolate, since that lady is supervisor), you have been seen, young gentlemen. The Fates cannot deprive you of that.

Chapter II

leads us back, mankind banished, to the doings of Sister Joy

SISTER JOY meanwhile had scuttled bunchily up to Sister Superior's room, and been closeted therein with her and two other Sisters. Their theme was Zoë, their text, *We must find her a place.* On this base each Sister delivered a homily.

When, fourteen years earlier, the child had been sent to the care of Saint Nytouche's Sisters, an aunt, name and domicile wisely undivulged, but who boldly confessed to the relationship, had placed in the hands of the Sisters' bankers a sum of money sufficient to pay for Zoë's schooling and keep for fifteen years. At the expiration of that time the Sisters had undertaken to place her in a situation, for which they set themselves in the interval to fit her. Or, should she feel a call at the age of nineteen, she might reasonably adopt the Sisterhood as a centre of work and devotion. To which alternative the Sisters had amiably assented in presence of the aunt, rejecting it entirely and irrevocably as soon as the dame departed, which at once she did, relieved of all claim to Zoë and sinking unknown out of sight. The reason for dismissing Zoë's probable vocation so unanimously and definitely was that at the end of her fifteen years' training that young person would be, to quote themselves, *without*

the halfpenny; her future piety, devoutness, and value as a teacher weighed, the disability outweighed them; Zoë, as a Sister of St Nytouche's, even at the callow age of four, when infant piety holds out no definite hope of future consecration, was found wanting. The worthy Sisters, whose order was wholly educational, decided therefore to bring Zoë up with the idea of being a teacher, but a secular one. The alternative hazarded by her most nebulous relative was never offered to Zoë; in no circumstances would she have considered it seriously; she had no vocation; nearly a decade and a half spent in a convent in the care of chaste Sisters had not fostered in one pupil the desire to emulate her instructresses. She despised the women who taught her, belittled their knowledge —with how much justice she did not know, as do we—refused to hear of their wisdom, and had the hardihood to say to the astonished ladies themselves, voiceless from horror, that the Sisters' morals didn't exist. Rebellion was horribly made free of the sanctity of St Nytouche's.

In all branches of her education Zoë was a cheerful failure. Not letters, nor history, neither the use of the globes could she understand. Conquerors might strive and binomial theorems display themselves alluringly before her; she remained cold. No interest attached, for her, to foreign countries except England, and poetry had a dreadful way of becoming balderdash when she was called upon to say her little piece. She could talk English rapidly and with command of many words; no compatriot did she know who would criticise her accent. When, as a

tiny creature, she had lisped her earliest words at the convent, she had been helped thereto by a solitary English Sister, who loved to hear her own language ingenuously pattering from the lips of a child. Until Zoë's thirteenth year, that Sister had stayed at the convent, and the two had a bond. Since her departure, accent had triumphed with Zoë; she spoke English grandly, but the taint of a foreign tongue was there. No one taught English now at the Convent, for the simple reason that Zoë alone knew it and she wouldn't.

It was all the more necessary to place her in a situation. Sister Superior enumerated her qualities on her fingers. Little finger, she can make a dress fairly well, but her sewing is poor; annulary, she has two languages; middle finger, she has a charming manner when she likes, *not very often*; index, she is exceedingly personable; thumb, she ought to be, bless us, well-informed; right thumb, she writes a neat hand, but spells atrociously in French, presumably no better in English; index, she is active, and fleet, and graceful. Sister Superior's list, swelled by the promptings of her three juniors, came to an end. She held up hands imparidigitate.

"Seven qualities, none available as assets," groaned the holy woman. She reflexed each finger in turn, cogitating; nothing was the result.

"French and English," Sister Patience clung to, hopefully.

"That is our chance," said Sister Superior, lighting on that finger. "Two languages."

"Bless us, she can't teach," snapped Sister Joy,

remembering vividly two lessons she had supervised while Zoë was nominally trying to instil the rudiments of her original tongue into the younger ones.

"She has another year," said Sister Patience.

"Of course there's that," said Sister Superior, "but a year is not too long to seek a post for her. All her class-mates are leaving——"

Heaven be thanked, was Sister Joy's pious mental ejaculation.

"And she can't stay here doing nothing."

I'll see she doesn't do nothing, Sister Joy meditated, with rancour.

"Send her to me," said Sister Superior, and her attendants went away.

Zoë came briskly up,—fleet and active she assuredly was,—knocked, entered, courtesied—not by any means the elaborate performance of two minutes before—and stood at ease. She expected, whenever she was summoned to Sister Superior's office, to be told the story of her parentage, unknown to her. She knew of her coming, mysterious and inexplicable as that of Arthur: it had engendered in her the belief that she was the scion of some noble race, not perhaps in direct line—the novels must be blamed for providing that idea—but most surely offspring of wealth, blood, and lands. Her willowy figure, among the fleshy damsels of Belgium; her pale hair, without curl and silky, in a land where moss-haired girls are as common as gooseberries; her grace and agility, against the ponderosity of her companions; all went to support this theory. She claimed nobility mentally as a right. Her speculations were wrong; she sprang

from nothing less respectable than the union of a British stockbroker's clerk and a young lady of middle class, married early, and dying soon, leaving their child orphan at the age of three. The magically evanished aunt was sister to the father, whose humble savings and investments had realised the very sum sufficient to pay St Nytouche's Sisters for fifteen years. The amount was small, in comparison with the need, as the lady wisely considered it in company with her husband. They had a family "coming along"; she bundled the small orphan out of England and retired to that land instanter, having definitely and for all time rid herself of Zoë. The action was more shrewd than kind; it is clear that, in the long run, it was more charitable to the lisping object of it.

The girl's name was all she retained of those days: it was, in addition to the handful of money, all that the young parents had to bequeath: there are worse legacies than that. If poor Caxe had had a fortune, Zoë would have been the poorer. As it was, bundled away, the dust of her shaken from avuncular feet, hands washed of her, she enjoyed at any rate the liberty of poverty, in which state our friends somewhat, and our relations wholly, are apt to leave us severely alone. Now she faced Sister Superior, awaiting the exhibition of her genealogical tree.

"You must have a situation," Sister Superior uttered, genially.

Zoë crashed to earth. "Yes, Sister Superior."

"Teach," her guardian murmured tentatively, without interrogation.

Zoë's head said no.

"A companion?" said Sister Superior more loudly.

"Perhaps," demurred Zoë.

A Sister knocked at the door. "Wait," she was bidden.

"A lady to see you," said the keyhole, shrilly.

"Eh? What lady?"

"The mother of Lalage Cari-Pède."

There were younger Carie-Pèdes nearing educable age; Sister Superior dismissed Zoë with a recommendation to the highest powers. Zoë took her way back to the hive of femininity; all were on their knees, Sister Joy in her pulpit. Claire recited Rosary. Black backs, devoutly curved, formed lines across the room.

"Sit down," said Sister Joy, "sit down. Vous êtes bénie entre toutes les femmes."

Zoë sat, understanding which part of the Sister's exhortation was meant for her and which not. Let us hope the distinction was drawn elsewhere as clearly.

"Kneel, I mean," said Sister Joy, irascibly. "Je vous salue——"

Zoë knelt. The prayer went on; she was blocked in by all that was feminine; in the wet courtyard the cat gingerly sallied to take the freshened air. Responses swelled around. In the distance Madame Cari-Pède held the ear of Sister Superior.

Chapter III

tells in what manner Zoë (so to speak) fluttered her Volscians in Corioli

BROTHER FREDERIC, by virtue of his calling, a sexless thing, was free of the convent. Cat-like he basked in the sun of feminine confessions, and absorbed minor sins like balm. Absolution lay in the hollow of his hand; he considered himself an emissary, but a mortal one, an eating, drinking, and sleeping one. If he were ignorant of the more abstruse sciences, if culture were not his, he at least possessed the wisdom of experience. Reading on, you will hold him very wise.

For the pretty girls he invented (he cannot be denied invention) the most trying and copious penances, which varied directly as the beauty; the plain ones got lighter away, for two reasons.

First, because penance is to prevent as well as to cure, and Nature had safeguarded them.

Second, because their own appearance, which shocked him, would no doubt cause them some pain; lack of beauty is in itself one of the severer forms of castigation.

The plain girls liked him no more for this indulgence, which he had never expressed, you may be sure, but which every woman-jack of them, plain or pretty, realised. His popularity, by no means a

negligible quantity, lay among the Venuses. Who shall refuse him wisdom?

More than seventy years had passed over his rubicund head, and had made tonsuring vain. There were Sisters at St Nytouche's and Brothers at the Fraternity beside whom he was juvenile. By the girls he was considered old, on the ground that he was over twenty-six. Dare-devilry, sky-scraping, and rake-helliness are not the qualities of three score years and ten, but in his way the Confessor was a dear old thing.

Yet not he, not even he, had trod with bare fat foot above the ground floor; and he came every morning to say mass and every afternoon on some pretext or other. He liked the trot from the modest, onion-enclosing door of the Fraternity to the mossy and chaste portal that closed on nothing less fragrant than oleanders. On his continual way, he was obliged to pass a seminary for young gentlemen, whose genteel status, noted on a brass-plate, was not supported by their manners. From the windows of this gymnasium, our honest priest was hailed as Rusty Granny, the reddish-brown of his tunic and his corpulency suggesting the sobriquet to the far-from-barren mind of youth. He bore the abuse that accompanied that jeer (for you are by no means to suppose that Belgian adolescents let him go at that), with the pious resignation of the good soul that he was, putting it down to the abominable training that the boys suffered at the hands of the secular.

While Miss Caxe tripped down to her prayer and Lalage's mother held Sister Superior spell-bound in

the third parlour, our amiable cleric sat comfortably in the second, which looked out over the garden. He watched the rain, munched his bread and butter, washed it down with coffee, and talked to Sister Patience, who, loving Zoë sincerely, and fresh from her thrilling interview with Sister Superior, hoped to pave the way for her favourite by a word to the single male. This latter had no very great liking for the lady in question nor, for that matter, did he dislike her. She had consistently failed to interest him; he knew she wasn't clever; yet she was no fool; he believed her insincere in her profession of religion. He revolved, chewing the while, a dozen of her most recent confessions: they were entirely dull; she had been vain, she had been disobedient, idle, impolite. Well, she hasn't, he did her the justice to remember, had a vast deal of opportunity to do worse.

Sister Patience, excluded from this thought, sat in silence. The Brother, enjoying his own meditations, sat also silent, except for his audible munchings. She thought of Zoë's possible virtues; he of her probable vices.

"She means well," said the Sister.

"I trust we all do that," said the Brother, turning his eyes from the rain to the Sister's face.

"I trust so," she agreed, "but some *do* well."

"Ah! that is more promising," said Brother Frederic. "I hope, my Sister, that you are among those."

"I am among those that strive," said she.

"May you be strengthened and not fall," said the Brother. He brushed crumbs from his gibbous

stomach, and put aside his cup. The Sister gathered up the tray and cloth. "I can now see Sister Superior," said Brother Frederic.

"She is engaged with a lady."

"Who?" he blandly asked.

"Lalage's mamma."

"What about?"

"I don't know."

"I will see Sister Superior," he said, "in half an hour's time," and had begun to doze before Sister Patience had passed through the doorway with the crumbs.

The parlour door opposite was flung open at the same moment and Sister Superior issued forth, flushed, excited, beside herself. "Zoë!" she made the walls re-echo. Sister Patience put down the tray and ran off at a creditable pace for the hall, burning curiosity at the spur.

Sister Superior rubbed her eyes and read the list of Sisters, Novices and Pupils that hung conveniently near the door, with a recommendation to the Virgin to pray for them and protect them. The reading calmed her somewhat: the sight of so many vestal names re-assured a spirit ruffled by the mention of a man.

Not only of a man, but a Suitor.

Here was Sister Superior in her sixty-seventh year, and this, we solemnly assure you, this man was the very first experience of the kind.

Can you remain serene, ladies, when you are approached about such things, whatever your age, whatever your state?

The list drawn up for the Virgin's eye was read

through twice. Every Sister, every Novice, every Pupil was named twice by Sister Superior that day.

Into this inviolable casket of the ewig-weibliche, the unexpected man to appear was young Cari-Pède, and he did it by female proxy, namely, his mother. Bertrand's chief claim to notice was his massive sister Lalage, whose beautiful amplitude we have already had occasion to describe. The youth himself shared this massivity, he was grave, broad and short-necked, but this history has nothing to tell of him that shall portray him choleric, though the two attributes are generally held in communion. From afar, at breakings-up and prize-givings, he had watched Zoë, white-apparelled, neatly coiffed, reed-like, pale and beautiful, by the side of his immense sister, who, in like attire and with black wool vigorously brushed for hours beforehand, loomed broad and rosy in the forefront of St Nytouche's maiden cohorts.

Only once had he had the happiness of coming nearer to Zoë. He had enveloped her hand completely in his, while fluently complimenting her on her recitation of some gloomy verse or other (which she had spoken very badly), and had left the convent inflamed beyond expression. From the last breaking-up, Bertrand had been excluded; everybody male had been debarred; all but Brother Frederic had most ruthlessly been denied. The actresses from their eminent station two feet six above the seated audience looked sadly out upon a sea of grandmothers, mammas, fond aunts, cousins-female and sisters. The affair fell flat. True, every lady of the band enumerated applauded with energy and without

discrimination; they did their part well enough; the failure lay on the other side of the footlights. What *coryphée* would trip as seductively, had she only her grandmother, mamma, etcetera, to applaud her efforts? And, for the time, some of St Nytouche's girls were *coryphées.* Skirts had been thrown off, petticoats discarded, and at least three charming damsels had appeared, if you please, in tights. There you have it. That is why Bertrand and every other brother, cousin-male, uncle and grandfather arrived sulkily at half-past seven, the close of the entertainment, and got no farther than the vestibule. They were attended by some of the Sisters, and plied with beer and macaroons, but do you imagine that *this* would placate them? You little know mankind if that is your belief. At the end of the tiled corridor, behind the large green-painted door on the left, Lalage, Claire and Zoë took the stage in their novel attire. Art had it that they were men, and no doubt Zoë might have so appeared, had she been less coquette; but the precocious and flowery development of the two others precluded that idea. It may be that had they better filled their parts Bertrand and his sulky fellow-exiles might not have cooled their heels in the stony hall. Morose, they listened to the patter of applause that fat womanly hands ungrudgingly supplied: muffled and disguised, the feeble noise of it came to their angry ears. Their hands, for the nonce impotent, had before now raised thunder in that hall.

Claire danced a minuet: Lalage bowed with consummate solemnity, and the air of a conqueror of ladies' hearts; Zoë, for her part, pirouetted in the rôle of a

frivolous courtier. The play had it that he—Zoë —should come to nought for his very levity, and so the text made it very properly appear; every young lady repeated her lines with emphasis and correct action; no opportunity had been lost by the pedagogic and instructive author to point his moral: yet Zoë triumphed. Vice triumphant? Levity applauded? The Sisters felt it themselves most keenly when Zoë's slim straw-coloured legs whisked about the platform. Her acting was no better than anyone's else, it was no worse; but the others were less adept at dealing with their arms and legs; those limbs obtruded even to the indulgent eye; shapely beyond doubt they were, Lalage's something of the shapeliest, but they lacked verve. To the owners of them they were as leaden fetters, to be unwieldily borne and scarce to be disguised. They possessed Action, but not a whit of Twinkle. Before Act 3 was out, Zoë's legs held the stage; pirouettes she brought in, introduced whirls, invented reels, turns, hops, skips, jumps and astounding whisks at every moment; every tick of the clock was marked by a flourish, and not a phrase came liquidly forth from girlish lips but Zoë must be kicking. Standing she assumed the first position—you know it, heel in the arch of the other foot, both sprucely pointing; walking, up she went on to the very tips of her toes, producing marvellous insteps. Mothers, aunts and grandmothers held their breath, murmurs of astonished admiration ran about the room. The convolutions of the thinnest legs in the place belittled the play; co-performers were dizzied. In the wings and all over the hall, Sisters

pursed their lips or bit them or let them fall oafishly apart, everyone according to her lights: small good this lip-service boded to the innocent cause. Sister Patience alone, in a musty corner, working lamps, rippled to a laugh of delight. Zoë heard it and skipped the blithelier. It was some days later that Bertrand's passion, spared unavailingly this effective fillip, took spoken form. He was one of those incredibly slow mortals who have not fallen in love before their twenty-fourth year. He had been that age and over when he had realised his plight: for three calendar months had he wandered morose, but latterly had taken to reading the more serious poets in an excessively deep voice when none was by. Love wrought on him so that he committed some to memory, and fed the fires of his passion withal as he measured yards of calico in his father's shop. There, something absent-minded, he was wont to pass his days, aproned and servile, behind the counter. The shop was commodiously placed at a street corner: stray travellers from two roads found themselves unwarily stepping in, lured by the things in the window. The place was patronised by the Sisters of St Nytouche's; there they purchased the linen, calico, kerseymere, beige, cashmere and merino that went to swell them so bunchily; over that counter also the damsels of the school might, strongly guarded, bargain for their muslins, delaines, silks, mulls, and, it is whispered, hose; some things for use, some for ornament, and all for conquest. It was, if you will grant us the simile, like a magazine, where, safely insulated, ammunition might long time lie, unharming; but

taken forth by such dread sharp-shooters, its innocuity would be at an end.

On one occasion, and for two minutes, Zoë had stood there ; but alas for romance, Bertrand had been washing the ground-glass counting-house, in soiled blouse, necktieless. How could he appear ? He wisely hid, but eyed his beauty avidly. And this mighty draper desired the hand of Zoë, not to fit with a glove, not to bow over, but to possess.

Sister Superior blew out her cheeks and faced the list rotundly. Once and for all time here was Zoë's hash settled ; no situation to find, no year to endure, nothing to do but to expend the cash in hand on a genteel and modest outfit for the bride. Sister Superior had never dreamt such a miracle : verily the true faith is supported.

Zoë came. Sister Superior drew her into the second parlour and out again very rapidly, for there was Brother Frederic, slumbering ungainly, wedged between chairs and table and window. In the corridor then Zoë received in a series of telegraphic gasps these words : " Bertrand—Cari-Pède—is going to—marry —*you.*"

She believed her ears, and waited for more. It came.

" Madame Cari-Pède is here——

" You must see her——

" Before you see him——"

" Is he here, Sister Superior ? " Zoë asked, having no desire to hear the sentimental side of the business : the wits of the Cari-Pède family centred in the mother. Zoë preferred dealing with her.

"No, my little one," said Sister Superior. "That comes later"; and she pushed Zoë into the third parlour, shutting out immediately Brother Frederic's snores.

Madame Cari-Pède in her best bonnet, her best shawl, her best skirt, her best gloves, her best umbrella (on such a dreadful day, but one's son's first love is a great thing, and a cab is not so very extravagant, once in a while), sat by the polished table. Zoë looked at her, after a bow, and in turn at her reflection in every facet of the polished furniture. The floor returned her ungallantly reversed; the walls displayed her right and left sides and her back; the cottage piano gave a sectional view of her three-quarter back; the glass-case which preserved the Good Shepherd from dust elongated her face and bonnet ludicrously; and every reflection showed her agitated in the extreme. Zoë's gaze travelled round and came back to the original, who, catching her eye, was moved to speech.

"What have you to say to my dear son?" she inquired timidly.

Zoë faltered, touched by her tone; she spoke gravely: "I must think." She seated herself on one of the hard glossy chairs and stared with intentness at the glass-encased shepherd. Madame Cari-Pède in silence watched her keenly, recalling the very different circumstances of her own betrothal. She had brought her husband house and lands; but Zoë was penniless, Zoë had no property, Zoë had no kith or kin, Zoë had nothing but her ten talents and her bright wits, and —it must not be forgotten, was not, by the lady— her agile legs. Spite her nimbleness, Zoë was acknow-

ledged to be far from volatile ; if she were not shrewd, she was certainly practical. Watching her with Bertrand's eyes, the fond mother felt the power of health and beauty to be very great compared with houses and funds.

Zoë stared the plaster shepherd out of countenance. She longed to leave the convent ; life, excluded from its dismal walls, smiled to her. She was fond of Lalage, who submitted very placidly to affection ; she liked this good mother, who, gentle soul, had from Zoë's earliest days had a kind word or a packet of sugar plums for the pale-haired orphan on birthdays or festivals. At Zoë's first communion, which was Lalage's also, a fine cake had been sent to the convent bearing both names in spidery sugar-writing; the thought had been Lalage's, and from "home" the fruity luxury had been promptly sent, the one name first effaced to be written fairly with the other. *Zoë, Lalage*, they stood with the date in script as marvellous as the names. First Communion day for every girl had meant presents, letters, images, greetings in every form ; into the chapel gaily decorated Zoë was the only candidate who led no guest. On the altar no flowers with her name attached offered sweet odour to Mary. Greatly pained, she was drawn within herself with idle and unpleasant speculation, when Lalage, for all her passivity a generous, thoughtful creature, had come to her, taken her hand and insisted on sharing her mother and father with the child for the day. High jinks were the order of the festival, Zoë had borne her share ; jollification followed feasting, and it was astonishing how nimble some of the elders

became in a wild and joyous game. Zoë had wept her loneliness in her tiny cell for weeks beforehand; that night, weary with pleasure, she cried for happiness. It was this peaceful and honest family she was asked to join, to become truly Lalage's sister, to claim this worthy man and woman for her parents, to live surrounded by gentleness and be no longer a kinless, homeless, penniless girl. The vision called to her. She saw in fantasy the door of the convent swinging wide for her to pass out and clanging to behind her for ever; the door of the sunny house over the shop would also open, for her to pass in. The flow of her imagination was abruptly stayed. She foresaw that it would be changing one prison for another. For the first time, Bertrand came into her reckoning; she scrutinised him mentally without bias; she approved him entirely, but he failed to charm her mind's eye in the part of husband—*her* husband, that is; *quâ* husband she found him admirable, patient, unintelligent, fond. She hoped he would marry some nice girl who should appreciate these qualities and prove a blessing to him.

She had gazed, up to this point, so hard at the Good Shepherd that her eyes crossed and she saw two of his plaster head and neck. She closed her eyes and opened them again and rose.

"Shall I leave you, my dear?" Bertrand's mother asked.

Zoë paused, reflecting that a day, a week, a life-time would bring no different side of the question to view.

"I will come again to-morrow," said Madame

Cari-Pède. "I will give you until to-morrow afternoon to decide," she went on.

"I can't marry him," said Zoë, in a firm tone.

His mother flinched, held up a hand in amazement and defence. "I *will* give you until to-morrow," she announced. "Consider, my dear miss, he loves you, Bertrand loves you, my son loves you. He asks you honourably in marriage. You have no mother, no guardian save these good Sisters. Don't, I beg of you, don't decide lightly, since you have no one to decide for you, scarcely anyone to advise you. You must decide for yourself. Think. Consider. Deliberate. Reflect. Take time."

"I have thought. I have considered. I have taken time," said Zoë gently. "I can't marry him," she said, all drooping.

His mother rose, shook her silken raiment into place, stepped to the door. Dismay struggled with anger on her broad face; she no longer seemed benevolent; huffed and hurt she was decidedly. That the interview should take such a turn amazed her. Zoë's heart went out to the poor soul. Not thus could she let her go.

"I've been tempted, dear mother of Lalage," she said suddenly, taking that lady's hand, "I've been tempted to say *yes*, to marry Bertrand. And why? Just to get away from this. But I don't love him, and in after years I might meet someone whom I could love. And that, you must allow, is far from a good thought in a bride. So I resist. I refuse him. I say *no*."

Madame Cari-Pède was visibly affected by her

honesty ; the hand Zoë held had tightened to eloquence as the speech went on. Now she caught the girl to her.

"You unhappy, my dear ? Lalage is not so."

"Lalage has small need to be ; everything she wants, she gets ; she's leaving, and she has always been free to go home for holidays ; she only spends term-time here ; other times she is with people who love her. She will go to her home and soon marry someone she loves."

"You might grow to love Bertrand," suggested his jealous mother. "He is so good, so honourable, so affectionate. You couldn't help but love him in time."

"I respect and like him now," said Zoë.

"Then marry him, my dear. That is already much. The rest will be bound to come in time."

Zoë shook her head gravely, and a pause ensued during which Sister Joy could have screamed for the pain in her ear.

"I could almost marry him," said Zoë at last, "for the sake of having you for a mother."

"You won't risk it for your own sake," Madame Cari-Pède asserted.

"No, it's for him I refuse," said Zoë, "I should have nothing to lose, all to gain ; he'd be the loser. O, don't you see," she cried, all of a rush, "it's not marriage I want, it's freedom."

H'm, thought the Sister at the keyhole.

Madame Cari-Pède understood in a vague way. "You must get a situation," she cogitated. "They must place you."

"Yes, place me, that's it, let them place me."

"I must go to my boy," said the elder woman. Both sighed, they embraced fondly, kissed without reserve, and each furtively wiped a tear. Zoë went out, she found the amiable Sister Joy in the corridor, but at a good distance. The Sister fetched Sister Superior.

Pentecost was revived; Sisters ran up like dogs to a squabble, the group swelled, a crowd it were fitly called. Every Sister, regardless of her lack of hearers, told of her experiences with Zoë. Indictments, accusations, incriminations hurtled harmlessly about; every venial fault, every imaginable mistake that Zoë had possessed and made, was brought to light. She had the grace to blush thoroughly during the whole scene. Madame Cara-Pède joined her pipe to the chorus, recapitulating Zoë's candour, her honesty, Bertrand's virtues, his affectionate disposition, his certain despair, her own goodness and her indebtedness to the Sisters. She was thus spared the detailed recital of Zoë's misdemeanours; the good creature even in the midst of her trouble could not bear to be talked down. Her pain was largely assuaged by the free use of her voice, but in sign of her agitation, she forgot to send for her own Lalage, or even to ask how that passive monster did. The chatter aroused Brother Frederic; with the dexterity that is made perfect by practice, he hoisted himself up, and clattered with his amazing protuberance out on to the tiles, where he hovered about the group. Zoë saw his advent with dismay. The tales so loudly re-echoing were many of them ill-fitted for man's hearing. He beckoned to her.

"What is this, my child?" he inquired, very like, in tone and eagerness, an errand boy on the outskirts of a crowd.

"What is what, my Brother?" asked Zoë in return. He expressed his meaning commodiously in a gesture, pointing to the seething Sisters.

"They are talking," said Zoë.

"So I observe," answered the Brother without irritation. "And about——?"

"Me," our minx had to confess, her cheeks aflame at a tale of Sister Industry whom the scapegrace had once most foully entrapped; this history tells no more. The Brother was at a disadvantage; he could catch no story entire, many indeed were screamed piecemeal and left unfinished as others were recalled to the tellers.

"What are they going to do with you?" wondered Brother Frederic.

"Eat me alive, I expect."

"Have you ever confessed this to me?" he asked, as a strange sentence reached him whole.

"Not in detail," said Zoë.

"Why not?" he inquired, with diminishing blandness.

"I couldn't, to a man," she blushed. "You ought really not to be here now, only you can't hear."

Brother Frederic gasped at her; the incoherency of the information flying about tormented him the more.

With such crying and ejaculating, waving of arms and twiddling of fingers, the party arrived at the door, Zoë and the panting Brother on their flank. The tone changed, recitals abruptly stopped; all were

smiling, benignity flowed from them. Madame Cari-Pède bowed, Sister Superior bowed, her henchwomen bowed, Zoë dropped her regal courtesy, Madame nodded to her kindly, and the affair was of the inviolate past. Brother Frederic bowed a great deal too late, no one noticing him.

Miss Caxe turned her thin back on the silent and fearful group of Sisters, who having barred the door with dread noise, turned in bulk to resume their several tasks. With her head disdainfully erect, she made for the corner, where the roomy hall dwindled into a corridor.

"Zoë," said Sister Superior.

The delinquent turned, looked calmly at the group.

"Il faut me placer," she said, and marched round the corner.

Chapter IV

takes the reader finally away from the shelter of convent walls and sets him in the whirl of commerce

THE Sisters and Brother Frederic stood in a partial silence; no word came from their lips, but their breath surged noisily. They moved with one accord towards the parlour lately occupied by Brother Frederic and Morpheus. Those that could enter did so, a contingent remained in the corridor, eyes and ears alert. They waved their heads mutely in their coifs.

"What are we going to do with that Briton?" said Sister Superior.

"What is it all?" asked Brother Frederic, who had not spoken since Zoë's blushing reproof had robbed him of articulation.

With dread solemnity and emphasis Sister Superior recounted everything, illustrating the misdemeanant's ingratitude and blindness, expatiating on the former shortcoming, and finishing with implied anathema. Brother Frederic began to see light.

"But who wanted to marry her?"

He was told fully, much of the former explanatory discourse was repeated blithely. It was said that the wooer, so deliberately refused, would have the shop, was almost a partner now, and that the children of the union would be bound to come to St Nytouche's.

"Dear me, you look pretty far forward," commented the Brother, and lapsed into retrospective meditation. Sisters eyed him hopefully; they held it monstrous that Zoë should have refused.

"She said," whispered Sister Joy, in the pause, "she said she didn't want marriage but liberty! There!"

"Oh!" cried the Sisters in chorus.

Brother Frederic fixed the speaker with a severe look. "You are a fine one," he began, in his coldest tone, "my Sister, to pick holes in this poor child's character. *I* saw you holding your ear with your handkerchief. You've been listening. You have, I say. You are suffering from ear-ache, heaven-sent. That is why," he said, generally, with a view to a homily, "that is why keyholes are draughty. Man makes the keyholes, it is true, but Providence blows the draught. I will speak to you later, Sister Joy. You may retire."

She retired as speedily as she might.

"Young Cari-Pède," continued the amazing brother, in the respectful silence that fell, "is no better than an ox."

Sister Superior, still aghast from the behaviour of Zoë and the sudden swoop on her erring junior, met this third shock with no defence. She went down before it, mentally; her few wits scattered; ideas jumbled each other hopelessly; words and idioms without bearing on the case came dumbly to her quavering lips. Brother Frederic stared stonily at each of the Sisters in turn, his bovine accusation unanswered. When his gaze met that of Sister Superior

she was just beginning to gather her wits, and an idea took form. *That minx*, it clearly became, *has bewitched him.* She did not express it. Second thoughts are often better, for production, at any rate. She awaited fresh developments. Brother Frederic held her eye.

"The girl is old enough and wise enough to choose."

Thought number two. *This man is evidently mad.*

Brother Frederic, not being telepathically inclined, ignored these criticisms perforce. He spoke again.

"She'll marry higher than an ox or a draper, see if she doesn't. She's a charming creature. Any man might be proud to possess her."

The third thought in the mind, still whirling, of Sister Superior got no farther than *O you wicked old man, I do think*—— and had to stop.

Brother Frederic rose; the process, in his most exalted moments, had its own dignity. "Understand, if you please," he intoned with his hands laced before him over his stoutness, "that Miss Caxe is my child, inasmuch as I have been her religious instructor, her leader in doctrinal questions and at all times her confessor. I approve in the highest degree her conduct on this occasion. She must have wisdom to act so sensibly. Generous her behaviour shows her to be. I am very sure," he went on, solemnly, "that had one of you been proposed for——"

"Oh!" screamed they all in unison.

"Miss Caxe would not have listened at the door. She is to be left unchastised for this. What she said

was very sage. I approve her idea. I commend it. Il faut la placer."

It was my idea, thought Sister Superior sulkily.

"We *will* place her. I give you a free hand, my Sisters. Place her anywhere you like away from here, except in Cari-Pède's arms." After which unparalleled indelicacy, Brother Frederic rolled himself away.

The bell rang long and loud. Translated by the aid of crying digestive organs, its speech meant *goûter*; it was four o'clock, a meal called lunch and consisting of bread and coffee decked the refectory table; no girls intruded, even the novices fed apart. The Sisters shuffled in list shoes along to their quarters, speculating silently. Sister Joy awaited them.

"Does Brother Frederic expect me?" she asked, very coldly.

"He's gone," said Sister Industry, and a half-hearted conversation began about the rain. It was not brilliant, neither was it sustained. The Sisters finished their meal in complete dumbness.

Brother Frederic, paddling home in the lee of damp-sodden walls, chuckled to himself, "I think I touched 'em up a bit," he murmured, joyously. "I think I roused 'em."

Rude boys from the Gymnasium yelled at him; he kissed his hand to them, derision turned with swiftness to infuriate passion. A soft answer, it is widely understood, maddens a boy. The old gentleman splashed past, his wet tunic dabbled at his bare ankles, muddy water flowed between his foot and wooden

sole ; yet was he entirely content. A certain savoury feeling of amaze mingled with his satisfaction, he had taken himself unawares, and you know how pleasant that is. He had had no notion of defying the whole Sisterhood, castigating the second in command, reprimanding Sister Superior, giving the band a dressing-down, and abusing a worthy citizen, all for the sake of a chit of an Anglo-Belgian. Until his first speech in that memorable scene, he had been quite ignorant of the part he was to play. Complacently he recalled his tone and words.

He had no idea what Zoë should do. Homeless, friendless children were rare at St Nytouche's. The responsibility had never been referred to him. He regained the Fraternity, kicked off his soles, rubbed his feet on the fortnightly handkerchief he affected, and forgot the damsel. She faded completely from his mind, and he dozed and prayed alternately in a state of intense comfort, which no sense of responsibility came to disturb.

Not so the Sisters. Each one remembered with extreme vividness the circumstances and cause of the scene. Their refreshment at an end, Sister Superior rose.

" My Sisters," she began, as blandly as the Brother himself, " we have, every one of us, our duties towards each of the children and young women in our charge."

She means Zoë, was generally thought.

" To any that have no father, our duty is increased. Still more, when a girl is motherless ; should any be unfortunate enough to lack both parents, we owe to

that one our tenderest solicitude and most watchful care. Such an one, my Sisters, exists. I speak of Zoë Caxe ; motherless, fatherless, without kith, and without kin (and no money either)," she interpolated in a different tone, " she has every claim to our attention, instruction, and advice. We have for fourteen years, some of us, others for part of that time, paid her these duties. But they have by no means lapsed. We may not cease to be at her right hand and to strengthen and counsel her while she is in our midst. She has thought fit to refuse a most honourable and profitable offer of marriage. She is a woman in years. She realises probably that marriage is not her vocation. She has told me to-day that she wants to earn her own living. She shall do so ; I have assured her of my acquiescence in the plan."

Sister Superior stopped abruptly. A Sister at the end of the table was bouncing with a suggestion. At this magnificent opportunity to produce it she burst forth, incoherently and with apparently little reason :

" Hairdresser in the most fashionable part seeks young lady of good address and appearance as assistant. Must have," said the Sister sonorously, " must have good hair. Apply Joseph. Joseph," she went on, so that it seemed to be part of the advertisement, " is the clever young man that has invented the infallible. It makes your hair grow in a week. Baldness overcome ! Don't grow old ! There ! "

Sister Superior pressed gently for elucidation.

" The turnips," said the eloquent junior. " It came

round the turnips. I know I oughtn't to read it, but I saw that. I thought of that—of Zoë."

"A newspaper," it was hazarded.

"Just so," said Sister Superior. "You have kept it, my Sister?"

The paper was brought.

Zoë read the advertisement also, in the privacy of Sister Superior's room. She was surprised and pleased to find there was to be no storm. She stroked her silky head and squeezed her chignon lovingly.

"I have good hair, Sister Superior."

"Beautiful hair, my child."

"Thank you. Will you apply to Joseph or shall I?"

No longer had it taken to settle her mind than that. Sister Superior wrote; to the piously inclined imagination of that lady, as to that of Zoë, Joseph was an agent of angelic mission. He proved to be a much bepuffed and curled agent; fashionably attired, as befitted his high station; genteel in manner. He arrived at the convent in company with a sister, whose share in the business was equal to his, but whose modishness, curliness, and gentility were negligible. She was pale with the pallor of disease, dull-skinned, grey-haired; shy, kindly and well-spoken. It was she who expatiated on the advantages of the post they offered. A hair restorer, miraculous in effect and ridiculously cheap, to quote advertisements, was the hope of these two. On it they intended to found their fame: if posterity knew them, it should be through the infallible liquid. They waxed eloquent in duet of this astounding remedy. Sister Superior's

vows necessitated a short crop; she listened civilly and without interruption, but without enthusiasm.

In a pause she brought them back to her charge. "She can speak English," she suggested, coaxingly, and sent for her. Zoë was particularly charming. She intended, whatever the means, to leave the convent; it had not appeared convenient to quit it on the possessing arm of a lover in the drapery line. As a free woman she would step outside, shake off the dust of the place and make her way in the world. She meditated this in measuring the visitors.

"Below her knees," she heard Sister Superior murmur, and caught the three gazing at her hair. She was placed. Terms were agreed upon. A lodging was assured her in the house of Joseph's aunt. Zoë felt her chains loosen; more than one heart was lightened in the convent.

She skipped all round the hall, followed by Lalage's full eyes. "I'm going," warbled Miss Caxe, "I'm going to be a shop-girl." Nobody believed her. Claire thought the jest poor; Lalage wondered that someone didn't fall in love with the delightful creature; others gaped in silence. "I'm off," sang Zoë, "off to be a shop-girl." She danced and whirled and pirouetted in her heathenish way right under the nose of Sister Joy, singing lustily. That unflagging Supervisor allowed the freedom unchecked; a certain recent tussle with Brother Frederic preventing her wreaking her spite on the girl.

"Off to the shop," chanted Zoë, and kissed the marvelling Lalage. Claire permitted herself a shudder abhorring with true aristocratic feeling the notion of

shops. She figured Zoë in court-dress and decided it suited her better than the shop-girl's attire. As we say, not one believed the song.

Monday saw Zoë leave the convent in company with a small black box and three hundred and seventy-two francs in specie.

The world was hers.

Chapter V

carries us far and wide

ZOË'S new home lay in an antique house in the oldest part of the town; brilliant shops and modern dwellings had been built near by on the sites of ancient houses now demolished. The beauty and fashion of the city lived within three minutes' walk of the place; on one side the backs of their gorgeous apartments looked with distinct aloofness over the remnants of the old town. They blocked the sun-setting very thoroughly; night came early to the humbler people living in the hollow.

It was a business to get into the house; you stepped into a damp grave some thirty inches square, and plied a knocker that shed rust in fine powder; you were let into another grave a foot lower and not very much larger, while your hostess made to shut the door. This was the onus of the business; she effected the operation delicately by dextrous shuffling of herself, the door and you, until the hinges would work; her size militated against the performance. With any one as slight as Miss Caxe, the affair was speedily over and the fortunate entrant was made free of the kitchen that radiated heat from every corner. It was surprising that the door-graves should be so very damp, when the room was always so dry that one's usual form of salutation was a ticklish cough. The kitchen was lighted nominally

by a window, which disclosed half-length portraits, from the wrong end, of passers-by; in reality the bright open fire illumined it.

Zoë's room was an ill-lighted cupboard containing a bed, a close-stove, a chest of drawers, and a chair. To dress with ease, she had to put the chair on the bed and use the stove—ordinarily cold—as a table. To this haven she was driven, and in this luxury of freedom from surveillance she slept her first night.

Morning brought her great energy; she dressed with feverish haste, knelt to her prayers, missing never a bead, but her mind was earthlier employed. In the kitchen an odour of spirits reigned, not emanating from the solitary occupant; following it, Zoë came to the door; the trail was distinguishable in the damp air of the morning. It hung above her path until she had passed a small public-house; she was astonished at the sweetness of the air that lay beyond.

The rainy nights left pavements glistening and cold, the air wet and obscure. The chill asphalte struck through thin shoes and cotton hose; the damp pointed unerringly to weak spots on lungs. Trees overhead dripped monotonously, their stray drops sliding craftily between collar and neck. The boulevards hung mistily secret; all that passed were workers, not pausing to chat, pattering along in disgust among the icy puddles.

Out of this unwelcome moistness came the street-cleaners with hose and turn-cock; what the rain had left untouched they proceeded to deluge. The passers-by groaned; ill-directed streams of water splashed about them, not douching them entirely, but ricochet-

ting from curb or tree-trunk in showers. At every groan the scavengers laughed; to protests they replied with ribaldry.

Zoë slipped successfully past, escaping both soaking and coarse gibe. Her feet were icy-cold, her face blue, her eyes red-rimmed; an exquisite pain held her nose, the flesh of her arms trembled. So benumbed was she by the autumn cold that she could not open the door of the shop. A servant let her in, without greeting, and to Zoë's inquiries as to where she must go, returned an uncivil answer. Martha stepped out, drew Zoë into a little room back of the shop, and gave her breakfast. The rich coffee and sweet bread put life into the girl; her face grew warm, her hands had force.

Together they arranged the shop; glass doors were polished; jars of pomade, boxes of powder, daintily wrapped cakes of soap were brought out and disposed invitingly about. Two beautiful waxen busts, so life-like that a drunken person had held one in conversation for ten minutes on a certain occasion, were set ready for Joseph's attention. The arrival of that Napoleon set the place in a bustle; two young men appeared and assumed spotless coats and aprons, stropping was heard, the servant set out basket-laden, Martha screaming instructions after her down the street. Zoë was sent to put on a cotton wrapper, elegantly cut; it encompassed her slimness to perfection; its lavender tint became her. Unshaven gentlemen began to dart into the two sanctuaries behind the shop, emerging after a while pink-chinned, tentatively passing finger-tips over their fresh faces. Martha, her working apron discarded, reigned benevolently over the soaps and combs. The

wax heads, newly coiffed, simpered at their own satin-draped chests.

Joseph led Zoë to the window, installed her in a chair there; a table decked with brilliant instruments lay before her, a velvet footstool under her feet; green curtains hung behind. She sat with her left profile in full view of all passers. Joseph ran out to the pavement, back again to set a fold anew, out to the road, to the very trees opposite, and returned content. The town was lively now; a throng of people began to pass, not the hurried workers of the early morning, but people of leisure, housewives trotting to market, clerks on their masters' business.

Joseph unpinned Zoë's hair and strolling passers stopped open-mouthed. He brushed it, sprinkled it with the amazing restorer, combed it, and braided and banded it to perfection. Beauty of that time was content to leave her hair unfrizzled and unwaved and to reveal the form of her head. The hair was drawn smoothly back from the brow and up from the nape, and then woven into a solid mass behind the head. Coquettes of to-day laugh at such a style of hairdressing, but it had many points to recommend it—for the pretty. It set off a fine brow, a graceful neck, and above all a beautiful head. We are apt in these degenerate days to admire our damsels for their amount of curls and puffs; we allow them to hide their foreheads, to shade their fine eyes with distorted bouffes of hair; others again we placidly regard with delicate necks concealed beneath ill-placed pads of curls and twists; some of our timid fairs hide their shells of ears; others disguise their heads, concealing them under piles of French

combings and negro-crimpings that make the thinking man despair for the brains beneath. Their grandmothers did otherwise: well they knew *their* beauties. Their loveliness has been passed on, but into hands that treat it ill. The friseur triumphs and Venus hides her smooth head until a wiser age.

Mermaid-like, Zoë sat in the window and suffered combings at the apt fingers of Joseph. From his brushings and partings and braidings her head arose triumphant, broad-browed, and delicately balanced; the artist slipped a net of coloured thread over the marvellous knot, lavender to match the wrapper. He then constrained Zoë to rise; she rose, bowed with consummate grace to the gaping crowd on the pavement, paraded the small window with an air, balancing her trim head backward and forward, courtesied again and was seated. Joseph meanwhile stood inside, himself bepuffed and undulated out of all masculinity, rubbing the hands that had wrought the masterpiece; open mouths and round eyes filled the window; people taking the air on the now lively boulevard saw the block and hastened to increase it; the side-street drew off the foot-traffic of the main road. Youngsters scenting a fire, old ladies spoiling for a police interference, all scuttled up to the crowd, edged and slithered in, were no whit disappointed. The attraction was new.

Joseph unpinned the hair, brushed and so forth, right through the programme again. Zoë was admirably at ease. The vulgar gaze of the idlers was inexpressibly savoury to her; she noted with side glance the varying types that thronged about. The casual

observer must have believed from her air that she had submitted to the dual process of staring and hair-dressing for months. Nothing in her mien betrayed that she was in the first hours of her novitiate. Joseph glowed with success; he delighted silently in her phlegmatic attitude. The restorer, already widely advertised, began to sell; gentlemen chiefly stepped in for three francs' worth; soap, combs, tooth-brushes, razors, all these masculine appurtenances were popular at once.

Eleven o'clock passed, Zoë felt hungry; half-past eleven, the hour of the convent dinner, she was famished; midday, she began to feel faint; Joseph kept indefatigably on; the street was packed with people, students hurrying from classes to boarding-house, shopmen popping out for their dinners, priests, ladies, business men, people of leisure, all the ambulant population of the town was drawn to the barber's shop. The middle-class elbowed the people, townskips trod on the toes of a stray aristocrat, commerce and independence pushed each other about. And Zoë sat unmoved. Yet she had ceased to appreciate the stare of the crowd, and her head drooped, very slightly, but drooped, beneath the unremitting vigour of Joseph's brush. He had breakfasted later, and substantially, also his thirty-five years needed less nourishment than her eighteen. Half-past twelve drew on, the crowd lessened; Joseph led her into the parlour; one of the assistants had taken Martha's place, the other coped single-handed with the unshaven gentlemen. Cut-and-dried opinions concerning the weather filtered desultorily into the shop.

The odour of Martha's soup was soul-restoring; Zoë ate plentifully, was urged to eat even more; warmth and strength were revived by the fragrant herbs and crisp biscuits that ended the meal. The beer that Joseph and his sister drank had no attraction for her. She sipped water.

"Now I see," said Martha, "why you're so pale and slight."

"I am pale by nature," Zoë assured her.

"Nonsense," the good woman said, "every girl should have a rosy face."

Joseph demurred. "Beer fattens, Martha."

"Certainly."

"And makes red cheeks."

"Of course."

"Then she shan't drink it. Stoutness and redness don't go with that kind of hair."

"How if I stouten naturally," asked Zoë, "and grow red-faced?"

"Lots of English do," said Martha.

"Lots of English don't," Joseph retorted, "at Mademoiselle's age."

The afternoon was spent as the morning had been. At six the shop was closed; Zoë helped to put away the pots of unguent and tortoise-shell combs, assumed her hat, and went home.

Thus every day, except for the ten minutes morning and evening to set out and replace the counter-fittings, Zoë's occupation was passivity. She did nothing but sit still, rise, bow, sit again; so her days passed. The constant brushing and handling of her hair was entirely soothing. At times, particularly after the midday

meal, she dozed, and the idle watchers on the pavement smiled to themselves. Their comments, when she was alert, rejoiced her exceedingly. She loved their gaping admiration when her hair was unpinned and hung straight down her back. Ahs and ohs of pleasure greeted her ears when Joseph, with the pride of a proprietor, lifted great handfuls and let the yellow silk filter through his fingers. Even more delicious was the envy of modish ladies who decried the colour, texture and straightness of the hair. The humourists of the gutter came close to the window to shriek their witticisms at her; there was no need, the glass admitted nearly every sound. Envy, worship and vulgarity alike left her as they found her, erect, and calm under Joseph's comb. The restorer sold well, dwellers from the south of the town came on pilgrimages to her shrine, watched the beauty for a while, made bets as to whether she were clock-work. Neighbours of the convent recognised her vaguely; that head, that form, that hair, above all, they had seen, but where and how they failed to remember.

Madame Cari-Pède on her marketing day saw the crowd, edged alertly in, recognised as you may guess, immediately, and—held her peace. She thought the girl happier in such circumstances than cribbed in the convent. None of the disadvantages of such a life presented themselves to her little sensitive mind. She spoke of the sight to no one. When Cari-Pède himself came in with an account of this yellow-haired wax doll, as he held her to be, little interest was shown in the family. He, good soul, had never noticed Zoë's hair or looks; from his idle chatter

nothing was to be feared. As for Bertrand, he went a-junketing no more; no live show-dolls tempted him afar.

Zoë, with the corner of her eye, had seen Madame Cari-Pède, and also that meddlesome old lady, Brother Frederic. He managed to approach the window, saw open-mouthed and was seen. A moment passed, her eye came round, the cleric bowed, Zoé smiled and the incident was at an end. Zoë wondered if he would "tell," judged that he would, trusted tha the wouldn't, and sat in a tremor. She need not have been alarmed. Once the heavy door of the convent had closed after her, it was unlikely that it should ever open again to let her in.

Among the people who came regularly to the window was a young woman of style. She frowned, stared, looked contemptuous, strutted past at least twice in the day. Her arrival at all hours combated the idea that she was in a shop. She glowered at the quiet model with evident hate; varied her programme occasionally by walking past, head averted, chignon towards the shop. Joseph appeared not to notice her. The angry lady returned punctually next day. Zoë remarked a cast in her fine eye, very noticeable in the angry glare; and that she stared at her, never at the hairdresser.

Oho! thought the little head under Joseph's brush, this young person comes to see my employer.

She took an opportunity one morning to sound him casually. The damsel came, sneered, curled a full lip, looked blackly at Zoë and bounced off.

"She looks cross," murmured Zoë.

"She *is* cross," said Joseph.

"Who is she?"

"The lady I am going to marry," Joseph informed her.

As in illustration of this future eminence as lady of the shop, the young person came in next day. Before Zoë had realised what was happening, the young woman had whirled into the shop, poked her angry head between the green curtains and arrived half way through her first speech. This oration was an indictment of Zoë's modesty; her boldness, her brazenness, her absolute and astounding lack of common decency, were discussed: no one with the elements of modesty would, it appeared, make such a show of herself; the speaker touched in passing on Joseph's poor taste, his vulgarity, and his fickleness, which left her, she assured them generally, as it found her, *cold*. Her own eloquence certainly left her panting. When she reached a state of dumbness, Joseph stepped out from the window, took her by the arm and, with a graceful bow indeed, put her on the pavement.

"My dear girl," he observed, as a form of farewell, "you are really very silly. Consider your position."

The crowd which had gathered to enjoy the unusual sight of a quarrel in the hairdresser's window, cheered derisively. They had highly appreciated the strange effect of this irate head, appearing bodyless, as if by legerdemain through the curtain. Joseph returned to the window and his task. He felt Zoë's head somewhat unsteady and looked round to see her face.

"I want to laugh," she said.

"Do, by all means," said Joseph, blandly, and joined her ringing laugh himself. The gaping crowd laughed;

the paralysed assistants and customers, who had all been overcome by the scene, laughed; Martha laughed. The two juniors stropped their razors, the two lathered gentlemen elevated their chins and Joseph brushed on.

That night Zoë went forth earlier; she wanted to buy a petticoat and the shops in her employer's quarter were too expensive. Southward she knew where to find a cheaper place and had received leave to go thither. She took her time to choose her garment, strolled complacently through all departments of the shop and coveted everything. The shop began to grow empty. No more customers entered. Boys ran about with shutters, snappy attendants raised their voices, rolled ribbons and slammed cupboards. Zoë had to go. It had been perfectly fine when she had started out; it was now pouring. The pavements were running water. Zoë was without an umbrella; workwomen were scurrying past with skirts turned up, under huge dingy umbrellas that gaped in every seam. An omnibus of strange form and mouldy smell was due to stop at the corner, for the north; the vehicle arrived, it was already half-full, the glass of its windows ran wet within and without. Men and women stormed the narrow door, the boy on the step was powerless, the driver unmoved. The people that already sat in it were jammed into corners; all that could be seated wedged themselves in, their feet in heaped straw; others stood; the door was shut and the musty wagon rolled off. Zoë had been quite unable to get near the door; she sniffed the air of the omnibus philosophically, finding in its unsavouriness a good reason for preferring to walk. A voice accosted her as she hesitated.

"Which way do you go?"

Zoë paused, turned, saw a very broad girl under an umbrella. Her face Zoë could not see; her tone had been kind; Zoë answered civilly "Northward."

"So do I," said the stranger, "let's share my umbrella." They splashed amicably off in its shelter, Zoë expressing her thanks to the short stout damsel at her side. The girl moved fast; she had the brisk walk of her townswomen, a pleasant thing to see: short quick steps, each attended by a slight tilt, a displacement of the hips, the body all the while held jimply erect. Such a gait becomes ludicrous when a lanky or angular lady assumes it, but with youth and the perfection of buxomness, it is a good thing to behold. The present exponent of this walk performed admirably; she held her skirts with one hand and her umbrella with the other. At last Zoë gained temporary possession of the umbrella, then the owner carried it awhile, and so on in the greatest good fellowship possible. Zoë forgot the chill of the pavement and the discomfort of wet skirts; the rain poured with a steady rumble; other wayfarers groaned at rheumatic twinges or screwed their faces into an expression of angry resignation. Zoë and her comrade went fast but found time, somewhat breathlessly, to chatter; their bright voices drowned the noise of the rain. There was a tone of laughing familiarity in the stranger's voice; she appeared to be highly amused.

"Why," Zoë cried, remembering her bulk, "I do believe it's Lalage."

The amazing discovery led to the abasement of the

umbrella; in the dismal rain the new-found old friend embraced and kissed her Zoë.

"I recognised you at once, you funny little willow-tree," she declared. "Fancy your not knowing me!'

The umbrella restored to its sheltering height, they walked all the faster, very much like an I and an O out together (and only requiring the You to perfect it). Zoë led the way very joyously to her palace at Madame Plisse's, visiting on the way a pastry-cook's. Her thin purse was fortunately equal to the demands on it; macaroons and fondants, materials for a feast extraordinary, were invested in. As they stood in the shop, the two girls faced each other smilingly. Lalage indeed stood there, stout as ever, placid as ever, beaming on her beloved Zoë. Less than six months earlier these two had been fond friends, Zoë could have wept for joy to see her massive darling again. They climbed up to Zoë's room, goody-laden; seated enlaced on the lumpy bed, how much they had to tell! Lalage's tale was short, Zoë's also; they contrived to talk for three solid hours about their adventures.

Lalage lived no longer at home; as months had passed and no rich suitors had pleaded for her hand, she had come to the conclusion that she didn't care about being cooped up over the shop. To the horror of her mother, she had applied for and obtained a situation as young lady in a shop. Bulky middle-aged dames sat in admiration before her enormous form as she paraded in ample and magnificent robes the floor of the showroom. Other maidens, slight, not so slight, and not at all slight, performed with her; Lalage filled, very abundantly,

a long-felt want. If the less bulky ladies of the town might see their prospective purchases creditably worn in the milliner's pageant, why not the stouter ones? Lalage's handsome young face, fresh coloured and without wrinkles, assorted well with the sober costumes she wore. That probably added *chic* to the purchase. In being pretty and well-coiffed, in having an enormous share of *embonpoint*, and two snow-white hands, she filled the post she was assigned.

In the home Madame Cari-Pède comforted Bertrand, a great deal less afflicted than in the days we knew him. The father longed to have his great girl at home; the mother frowned him into silence. This parade, this constant peacocking was, to Madame Cari-Pède's mind, absolutely wrong. It destroyed a girl's modesty, made her *cheap*, gave her no end of conceit, and might lead Heaven knows where. You will remember that she approved of Zoë's sitting, with her hair down, in Joseph's window. So Lalage took her bulky beauty to rooms, and twice weekly called on her disapproving mother. As with Zoë, freedom meant to her entire loneliness of purpose. Cari-Pède father adored his monstrous daughter for an independence which her mother had long since annihilated in himself.

Zoë told *her* adventures, and they parted with kisses. Excitement kept our young lady awake for quite an hour. She had carelessly forgotten to ask for Lalage's address. The next evening took her in quest of the damsel, through a dreadful storm of rain, to the corner where they had met. Naturally she saw her no more.

She went back to her room, soaked through, and had to slip out of her clothes. Vainly she hunted for a pair of stockings. One pair was at the wash, another she found unmended, she boasted no more. She prepared to darn the worn holes, meanwhile her ankles grew like ice; the straw-coloured tights of her late performance were better than nothing, she locked her door, disrobed, put them on and settled to her darning. She had scarcely put needle to work when Madame Plisse knocked. Agitated beyond coherency, she yet managed to convey to Zoë's understanding that her dear, dear old friend was took bad in the oh! cells, and that friendship bade her go thither. If Miss would be so very good, just to keep an eye on the kitchen fire——

"Cells?" said Zoë, her thought monasterial.

"Police cells," she was pantingly informed. "My dear old friend Peggy sometimes, I wouldn't say it for worlds, my dear, but she does, a leetle—you know." Which elucidating sentence was accompanied by a tapping of Madame Plisse's finger-nails on Zoë's water bottle.

"Does she?" said Zoë, greatly at a loss. "Well, I'll bring my work down."

In her dressing-gown she followed her landlady below, locked the street door as she was bidden, tucked herself cosily into the chair before the fire, and finished her sewing. Her experience of fires was nil: this one had an open front which shed the heat benignly. Zoë tried to make toast, with no success, but she ate her bread lukewarm and somewhat smoky with all possible gusto. Her supper over, she dozed awhile, but speedily

awoke. A desire to dance possessed her: the tights recalled her triumph in the convent. Making sure that the curtain was well drawn over the window, she pushed aside the table and began to skip aimlessly about. Presently she cast off the dressing-gown and set to, earnestly. For want of music, she hummed and whistled all the joyful airs she could remember. Verdi, Haydn, Offenbach, Beethoven, Chopin, all gave their mite; cheerful solfa airs served her, hymns jerkily whistled were of use. To all the tunes she knew, she trod her tripping measures, pirouetted, skipped, and chasséed. What an acquisition had a tambourine been, to hold at arm's length and melodiously kick! The fire spluttered at each replenishing; she skipped to the wood-box, twinkled up to the fire, threw on the wood, and bowed herself out to the middle of the floor. Uncanny enough she looked in the light of the burning logs; she had economically extinguished the lamp. From the waist downwards she wore the yellow tights, upwards a white cotton bodice, perfectly plain; her arms were bare, her neck also. She unbraided Joseph's handiwork and shook the heavy silken mass about her shoulders. The hair swung widely; as she pirouetted it stood out from her head in a horizontal line; she whirled again and again until she felt dizzy. It was delicious to feel the soft hair fall on her shoulders. She sank at last, thoroughly wearied and content before the fire. To keep herself from going right off to sleep, she assumed as uncomfortable a position as she could without dislocation, and promptly slumbered. The good Samaritan and her soberly contrite companion had to knock twice before Zoë let them in; the minx

had heard the first knock, but stayed to coax the fire to life.

She went up to bed, yawning cavernously on every step of the stairs, wriggled out of the tights, and, in spite of the coldness of the sheets, was sound asleep in thirty-five seconds.

Chapter VI

brings Zoë by devious Ways to the Back-door of Fame

IF we seek eminence we must be content to be traduced and hated. Should our enemies be all of envy, we may well be glad. Zoë found she was not to get off with one display of temper; Joseph's *fiancée* might not return, but she was not, it appeared, the only infuriate person. Before a week was over Zoë observed another scowling face directed at her. Phanie, the work-woman at the shop, always churlish, had become distinctly uncivil; she vouchsafed no answer to Zoë's "good-day," looked menacingly at her when the girl suddenly glanced up.

"Everybody frowns at me now," she said to Joseph, plaintively.

"Another enemy, Miss?"

"Stéphanie."

"She has," he said slowly, "some wrong ideas. She sulks at me, also."

Nor was the train of frowns once started to stop there. Phanie returned from market in company with a young woman, who stood across the road and stared darkly at Zoë.

"I have more enemies," our damsel said.

"Who, now, I wonder?" asked Joseph.

"That black girl over the road."

Joseph brushed steadily on. "That is Phanie's daughter," he said calmly.

Phanie's daughter came no nearer than the other side of the road. To that station she returned day after day, staring blackly at Zoë, then going her way. Phanie left her there, entering with the marketing, but without a word to Zoë.

Lalage came past in the dinner hour and gazed admiringly at her friend. The evenings often brought them together, either in Zoë's narrow room or Lalage's airy garret. Lalage was a revelation to Zoë, as lively as herself when she wished, and infinitely more practical. They made a gay pair, chattering nonsense (none of it love, so please you !) and talking business.

"How you've changed ! " Zoë would cry.

"So have you," Lalage said. "We weren't ourselves in that prison. How could we be ? It seems so long ago."

Zoë asked casually after Bertrand.

"I know," said Lalage ; "some I heard from mother and some I guessed. He's very disappointed, you know, Zoë. But we hope he'll bear up. He takes his beer again, mother tells me."

"I'm glad of that," interjected his once-beloved.

"And I daresay he'll take a pride in having clean collars on soon," his sister hoped. "I'd have liked you for a sister, Zoë."

"Thank you, dearest ; if I'd a brother——"

"Too late," Lalage rosily implied, "I've got a young man."

It may be that that had changed her so much ; kind and loving she had ever been, now she lavished the

greatest affection on her friend. She had room for all love in her large heart; Zoë was at peace with her. She was like a mother to the kinless girl. A friend, to our lonely miss, was a great acquisition. For all her busy life and work, she needed, perhaps because of it, the relaxation of friendship after her day's toil.

The darkest days of winter were past; more people trod the dry streets and stood longer at the shop-window. What sunshine crept into the side street was captured by Zoë's sunny hair; it shone and glowed afar. But if more people came, they did not replace the original gapers. Zoë still observed her scowling watcher, Phanie's daughter, across the road, sometimes saw the future Mrs Joseph with nose a-tilt in the crowd. Joseph himself renewed, after long lapse, the subject of Phanie's daughter. She had been, he remarked, a servant in the house with her mother, but Martha, finding her unsuited to the work (Martha was very particular, he parenthesed), had dismissed her. The explanation was insufficient to account for the angry scowl Zoë-wards.

She saw the young woman in the boulevard on her way home and tried to catch her up, following her through a maze of streets and passages until she realised that the girl was trying either to decoy her away for some unguessed purpose or to escape her. She gave up the chase and tried to find her way back to the main street or some road she knew. All the landmarks were strange to her; she walked in absolute ignorance of her whereabouts; but recollecting that the sunset had been behind her, she faced it to return. The principle was sound, but the extraordinary irregularity and

crookedness of the streets made it impracticable. There were few passers-by, and such as she saw inspired no confidence; no shops, where she might ask her road. The polychrome sky was still bright as day, but the roads, dingy and ill-built for light at the best, were very dark. From the back of a large building a man issued, hatless and in shirt sleeves: he pinned a paper on a board by the door, and was going in, when Zoë accosted him.

"Any turning to the left," he told her, "will lead you into the main street. This is the back of the Oriental."

"Oriental what?" thought Zoë, when he had gone in. "Not theatre, surely? Some dingy second-rate hotel, I suppose." The paper on the notice-board, under an oil lamp, resolved her doubt. The ugly barrack *was* the theatre; the document announced that the management had vacancies for a few ballet girls, and that dancers might apply at a certain date; Zoë noted the hour and every direction and took the first turning to the left. The announcement had no meaning for her until those unlucky tights showed themselves neatly wrapped in the corner of her box. They recalled her triumph, her agility, and the management's need. Zoë stared, whistled, considered.

"I will go," she said to her Lalage, after a long rigmarole. "And I'll dance to the management."

"Will you? Well, I'm sure you'll do it beautifully, Zozo, my dear," said Lalage, in fond admiration. "What will you wear? I've got a gauze dress I once wore, I'd make it over for you."

"I've got my—tights."

"Your— oh, Zoë!"

"And my trunks," Zoë pinkly continued.

"You're not to go," said Lalage, her placidity overwhelmed. "It's not the thing."

"I shall go."

"You shan't, you yellow-wigged doll," said Lalage, with contempt. I'll see that you don't. Your mop will fetch all the men you want, my dear. I'll find you a nice fellow, Zozo."

Zoë blushed redder than ever. "I don't want a fellow, thank you, Lalage," said she, rather coldly.

"Don't what? Don't want to get married?"

"Not much," Zoë admitted. "I'd rather be famous."

"Gracious! You'll be famous if you waggle your legs in public, will you? H'm. I've heard the word lengthened for dancers before now. Go, if you like. *I* don't care. Walk all over the town in your yellow tights if you like," she sighed fully, "but don't say you don't want to get married. After all, ballet girls have married titles before now."

This veridical information closed the discussion. Zoë decided not to go.

Chapter VII

moves to the sound of Pipe and Tabor

THE black-a-vised damsel whom Zoë had in vain pursued had not fled for all time from our Miss's circuit. She and her surly mother lay in wait for our girl and stopped her decisively. The elder woman plunged without greeting into a story of Joseph's perfidy; the girl stood silent and abashed. Zoë listened amazed. For a moment the words that fell from the woman's lips held no meaning for her. The tale was a painful surprise; the manner of telling it gross in the extreme. Newly come from the respectful touch of Joseph's hands, she doubted, heard, made no reply; with an inclination of the head, but no word, she passed on. She strove to put from her memory the indecencies of Phanie's narration. The effort succeeded. The sanity of her pure mind rejected what was harmful, she was able to review the situation in this new light without nausea.

The matter stood at this; her employer was a profligate, his victim, Phanie's girl. The mother and daughter, believing, or pretending to believe, that Zoë had supplanted her in Joseph's affection, told this tale in the hope that she would *give him up*. If not the matter could be settled easily by a little of Miss Caxe's money; nothing could be simpler.

Joseph had been to Zoë a kind and just employer,

who paid her fairly, treated her honourably and fed her royally. When he spoke, he was familiar as a brother might be. A few weeks of employment with him had established them on a footing of great good fellowship; by this time, they were sound friends. They shared, with Martha, sundry family jokes, witless enough, but evoking a hearty laugh from all three. Joseph was as genial and generous as his sister: he had, it is true, a terrible habit of swearing at the two juniors (but not worse than our army in Flanders); Zoë and Martha heard him with admiration and awe on the rare occasions when he performed *coram populo*. Zoë dared to tease him about his failings; he retorted with well-crusted traditions about the English; the two waged international war at dinner-time, all in the highest good humour. Martha displayed an amazing talent for tergiversation, siding with one or the other at every word.

Phanie's words gave Zoë pause; she believed wholly in herself and from that circumstance derived much courage. She accepted the woman's accusation with an open mind, neither condoning nor condemning. She decided half heartedly that his misdemeanor concerned her as little as the young woman's frailty; but she believed Joseph to be a black sheep. She wronged him; he was as respectful to all womankind as he had shown himself to her. Like Zoë, he was faithful to himself, and no less pure than she. The partner of the young woman's disgrace was not our barber.

Zoë sighed for very amazement that there could exist so much vice in the world. If the convent training had kept the pupils childish in many things, it had not made them narrow-minded. Sister Superior had never

forgotten that the safest way to avoid sin is to recognise it early. Zoë knew that innocence itself, if alone, will not preserve a soul from evil. She was sad to think sin was so near to her, but not fearful of its proximity. With some disgust she contemplated her future brushings by the accused hairdresser.

"I'll go to the management," she cried aloud, when she got into her own room. Those tights, tidily folded in the trunk, had obtruded again. "I *will* go," said miss, "and dance myself away from Joseph."

And go she straightway did. Her bundle under her arm, her feet twinkling to get there in time, she dived into a side street, managed to find the funereal barrack and went in. The place smelled of paint and dust in equal proportions. Zoë was sent to a door.

At her knock, a young man opened, stared, laughed and pointed out the manager. A gorgeously attired lady, sitting on the table by his side, looked up, stared as rudely as the young man and drew her companion's attention with nudge and giggle to the newcomer. Zoë bowed as he turned round: he returned the salute civilly by raising his hat. She crossed the room in answer to a gesture to join a group of girls, each with her parcel or bag. An inner room was made ready for them, they trooped in, our young lady at their heels, to find themselves in an ill-lit bare apartment, whose only furniture was a long glass on the wall and a bench all the way round. The girls began to undo their parcels; bonnets, shawls and skirts were shed, boots drawn off, hair rearranged.

A woman of enormous girth and no beauty, unless that very breadth beheld one, presided, goddesslike,

over this Nirvana; she walked to and fro encouraging the girls and helping them to dress. Considering her size, she was wonderfully deft; her podgy hands fluttered over frill or lace to its obvious gain: a tweak here and a pat there shaped the *coryphées*, for the most part very dirty ones, in readiness. She was not new to the task of setting dresses to rights. She addressed Zoë by name; in her our young lady recognised Madame Plisse's bibulous friend who had spent several hours lately in a nucleolar condition.

The girl felt appalled at her own temerity in coming; it needed cheering words in plenty from the dresser to make her follow the others back to the larger room. She had taken the pins from her hair; its silky smoothness needed no brushing, she ran her hands over it and it was perfect. She drew about her her large shawl, and, yellow tipped by hair and heelless shoes, went after the troop into the next room. The dancers were grouped again in one corner, looking very cowed; the audience consisted of four persons: the manager, the lady, on the table by him, the pianist and the stout basso-profondo. There was no waste of time. The manager was impatient to get the affair finished. He called to one girl after another.

"You with the blue bows hurry up!" "Now then, black bodice, shuffle along!" Every girl so adjured sidled out of her cloak, handed a piece of music or whispered the name of some popular air to the ugly young man at the piano; he played nonchalantly, as if by clock-work. The manager assumed a stare. As each girl was called out she danced in the middle of the room, exactly in front of him. Some one or two he

allowed to dance for several minutes, recalling their steps brusquely and without deference; others he dismissed at the first kick. No comment was made, as the *coryphées* thumped singly about. The stout singer and the off-hand pianist began to stare as fixedly as their manager. The young lady at the table giggled at the dancers, or sniffed, all for the manager's edification. He paid no manner of attention, writing down the names of the girls he favoured and recalling them from his list, "Green garters—Sophie Arder? Right. Get off now. Black bodice—Jeanne Toquet—well, Tiquet, Tiquet; move along, there, Tiquet! Don't go to sleep, Tiquet!" Zoë crept farther into her corner, the last girl was called out, danced, gave her name with a tossing chin and went back. The manager hurried on, nearing the end. "You with the yellow feet. Out you come. Now then!"

Zoë felt that she would rather die than uncover herself before these people. The manager tapped his foot; the pianist yawned, holding out his hand.

"I've got no music," she said timidly.

"What shall I play?" asked he. Zoë gazed around in fear—every one was staring at her; whispers were heard.

"Go on, ducky," said the dresser from the inner doorway.

"I whistle," she said, and, slipping out of her shawl, burst simultaneously into her sweet flute-like note and wild dance. Not many girls could whistle in those days; the habit was considered masculine. Whistling was "not nice," and for that reason eschewed. We know how much Miss Caxe had cared for the representations

of her teachers; they had laid an embargo on the art; she had promptly practised it, together with the "steps" they did not allow at the dancing classes. And very clearly and melodiously she whistled, expending no force, not screwing her face into a mass of convergent wrinkles, but settling her lips to a small O and lengthening her cheeks adorably.

She showered charm on her audience, as she stepped in growing confidence to her own odd music. Every possible turn did she exploit, pirouetted every trill until her hair stood out like an aureole. Among the other maidens, short and buxom, she had the air of an overgrown boy. They had thumped the floor, swooped and sunk and kicked in the real conventional manner; our damsel skipped, swayed and even leapt about, in her mad gyrations. She finished her medley of tune and her dance to a faint murmur from the girls in the corner. The pug-faced young man whistled himself in amazement.

"Name?" said the manager.

"Zoë," she said, "Zoë Caxe," and could have bitten out her tongue the minute after.

"Where do you come from?" he asked curiously; and as she was dumb, went on, "You've never learnt to dance, you know."

"No, sir," said she, with a desire to cry.

"Well, come along," he went on; "come along, don't keep us all day. Here, Pian-piano, bawl for the others, will you? Now then, do it again."

As she stepped to the centre of the room, she saw that the young lady by the manager had left off laughing, and, on the contrary, frowned most blackly. When Zoë

noticed this, she was reminded of the look of Joseph's lady. This then was she, the scornful, angry future proprietress of the hairdressing establishment. Scowling, Zoë had always seen her, the cast underlined, as it were, by the force of her expression; the squint showed less over a smile.

Zoë piped her melody afresh, greatly uplifted. I am there, she thought in French, oh, I *am* there. Through the open door, Pian-piano reappeared, half a dozen people after him. They slid in along by the walls to make room for more. Zoë danced for sheer joy—if she had been nervous, she had quite forgotten it now; she whirled in an aureole of her hair and whistled herself breathless. There was clapping when she had done. Shawled again, she swept them her most regal courtesy, and received a variety of formal bows in return. One of the newcomers, a handsome woman, introducing herself as Madame Campobossi, took her hand, complimented her, made her feel at ease. The whole troop of girls went off to resume their walking dresses, Zoë with them. As they passed through the larger room again some were given slips of paper, others dismissed without a look or word. Zoë was bidden wait till the end.

"Well, Miss Caxe," the manager said, when the room was clear of the girls, "do you want to learn dancing? because if you do, we'll teach you. Signor Campobossi will teach you, for you don't know how."

"I want to dance," said Zoë.

"All right. Come round after the show to-night, and we'll talk further. Here's paper. That'll get you in. Don't forget."

The lady of the squint had drawn away in the meantime, frowning at the fat dresser, with whom she now shared the doorway. As Zoë came towards the door, she swept her full draperies away, tripping to some measure.

"It's a fair treat to see *you* hop, ducky!" cried the fat dresser with meaning, to Zoë.

"Get out of here, you drunken old Peggy!" shouted the modish lady, stopping in a graceful twirl at the piano.

"Think you can dance?" said Peggy. "Calves!"

Chapter VIII

takes us into a lady's confidence and shows how she triumphs over material objects

THE damsel, whose strabismus rendered imperfect the catalogue of her charms, had long been the leading dancer of the theatre; the lissomeness of her early years of triumph had, notwithstanding her nightly activity, become rather merged in accretions of the adipose. While her energy had not been lessened by this growth, her charm, to the mind of the Belgian, had kept pace with the increase of tissue, and she had retained her place as head of the ballet on the boards of the Oriental Theatre without question.

The manager had been, in earlier days, thrall to this beauty; her defective vision had in no wise interfered with his passion: some ladies who saw straighter yet walked more crookedly. Every evening for five years had she hopped and bounced in fleshings and ruffles before the admiring men of the town.

Long custom had endeared her to their hearts and eyes; but it must be acknowledged that Peggy's taunt had weight. That portion of the nether limb the dresser had so contemptuously named was in Miss Tauzy's case hyperdeveloped, so much so that she could no longer clap her heels together as no doubt, ladies, you still can do. There can be, to the unbiassed mind, no

disgrace in this, but Peggy meant perhaps to convey in her gruff-voiced ejaculation that however creditable and charming such muscular development may be, it ill befits a lady to flaunt it in public. The Terpsichorean art is conventionally restricted to practice by the sylph-like; Peggy held the conventional view.

Joseph, our Joseph, was, as we very well know, an artist. Beauty was his joy; at the theatre he might gaze unperturbed. Thither, toil-worn, he was apt to stroll, to taste the delights of aristocratic life by assuming evening dress and elbowing gilded youth in the stalls. Many were the timid fairs of the ballet he had admired from afar; the Tauzy—being a little less timid—had inspired him to closer admiration. He admired, unrebuked, she was considered a conquest; she knew he was one. Loudly might her wealthier satellites decry the hairdresser; he was her hope for middle-age. Dancing is all very well, but a substantial shop is, as one gets on (or perhaps we should say *off*), far better. Lissomeness, we say, she somewhat lacked; not so practical views. Joseph may have lingered for a moment in the hazy glamour of Love's young dreams; it dazzled but never blinded him; business was the light by which both of these worthy people read their destiny.

Things had come to a pass indeed with Miss Tauzy. A yellow-headed girl no thicker than your calf had danced in a new-fangled fashion, and Miss Tauzy had straightway given notice. What else could a lady do? And when the girl is the very one who has made trouble

between you and your adorer! It was to be one of Miss Tauzy's positively last appearances at the Oriental (they were to go on for a month); the all-important fact was hurriedly billed and itinerant hoardings with a man sandwiched between sent out to inform the populace.

Zoë handed over her ticket and in return was admitted to celestial arcana. The Oriental was really a music-hall, but she knew no difference. Cloaked and veiled she slipped into her seat, excitement shaking her. It was the first time she had ever been inside a theatre, and the beauty of its architecture and decoration mystified her beyond words. She believed, poor dear goose, that the mouldings were all pure metal, and meditated examining them closer on a more convenient occasion.

The orchestra twanged and scraped, shapely legs thumped and pointed. Humph, thought Zoë, I can do better than *that*. A tender young man sang of the joys of love. Another, less tender, tied himself into a human knot and undid himself with so much celerity and evident enjoyment that he had the air of preferring a position with his head between his legs and his arms holding a newspaper where he couldn't read it. Campobossi, basso profondo, and husband to the woman who had been kind to Zoë in the dance-room, bawled airs from Mozart. A young lady sang comic songs, exchanging badinage with the boys in the gallery between verses. On the whole, Zoë thought the exhibition bordering on the vulgar. She was right; the *habitués* of the theatres did not demand refinement,

the management catered for its public with nicety. There were moments when Zoë blushed thoroughly; oftener she was merely disgusted. Wit would have failed before that audience; the frequenters of the stalls were no more intellectual in reality than the roaring enthusiasts of the pit. Everything was thoroughly applauded. The evening passed pleasantly enough, except for the interruptions of a small boy, who had been given his door-money on the express condition, which he observed, that he should shout "Calves!" The shot told; a furious squint was levelled at him; man, proverbially fickle, laughed uproariously, applauding the child's shrill pipe rather than the departing sylph. It was generally believed that Peggy had engineered this feat, but the pug-faced pianist, Pian-piano, knew far more about it. In former days he had sued for, and been refused, Miss Tauzy's favours. He thought he had at last found a means of revenging this slight.

Peggy awaited Zoë when at the close of the performance she stepped round to the manager's office.

"Let a poor old woman be your dresser, ducky," she implored.

"You shall," Zoë gaily promised.

The manager had a contract drawn up. Zoë read it carefully twice; it bound her to the Oriental for a year. She bared her hand and signed with a flourish. The manager signed also, she had become their employée.

She declined, civilly, the offer of refreshment and

escort. She was understood to mean, *for always*. Her modest manner and her confidence in herself assured her safety. She was set on a plane apart from the other dancers. From one only among all the men connected with the theatre did Zoë receive any offence, during the whole of her sojourn among them. They were as deferential to her modesty as Sister Superior herself. With this solitary exception, she remained unassailed and respected by all. She trusted herself so thoroughly that she dared to trust them implicitly, and from that evening, when she put back her veil and signed above the manager's greasy finger-marks, she went without fear.

An altercation was heard without, voices feminine in increasing volume filtered through the door. Miss Tauzy and Peggy argued, the latter opposing the former lady's entrance.

"Go away, Tauzy mia," she was bidden by the manager.

"You're in there, are you?" cried the offended dancer. "Let me in."

"Come in if you want to," the manager said in the midst of invisible scuffling.

"She's holding the handle," Miss Tauzy shouted.

"She says she'll tear her hair out if she can get at her," Peggy bawled.

"Go away, you silly duffer," said the manager.

"What did you say?" sibillated the keyhole.

"Silly duffer was what he said," triumphed Peggy. "Silly duffer! Calves!"

The sound of panting was succeeded by an appall-

ing crash, and, as though in illustration of this last cry, through the lower panel of the door, so courageously defended by Peggy, came one of the feet of Miss Tauzy, surmounted by the calf of contention.

Chapter IX

presents Miss Caxe arriving, in the French sense, in trunks and hose

ALAS! the public display of the Terpsichorean art is not attained in a day, as our Miss speedily found. Joseph, her employer, had to be approached; she went straight to the point with him. He heard her in silence, staring at her.

"I know," he said, when she had failed to explain.

"Know?" the minx repeated. "Oh, of course," she murmured, remembering, with vivid blushes the little boy's cry.

"Aunt's funny old friend, you know," Joseph offered vaguely.

"Peggy?"

"She's a dresser, dresses the Ballet. Saw you dance, you recollect," he went on, baldly.

"Yes," said Zoë. A silence fell.

"Do as you think best," he took up at last, with a sigh. "In a month's time?"

"Saturday," Zoë suggested.

He agreed, and set to brush her as deftly as ever; but though the subject was not again broached, she knew that he was angry. No word was said at the dinner hour to Martha. It was borne in upon Zoë, both during the day, and when she talked the matter over

with the farther-sighted Lalage, that she had behaved shabbily to Joseph the accused. She did not know how to make amends. Saturday came, and she went away without a word to the unconscious Martha, leaving it to Joseph to wound that kind creature. She made, as you have rightly supposed, a dreadful out-cry; and the shop was very desolate in its old regime: soap and sponges in the window, but no fair-haired model to admire. The midday crowd particularly felt the loss; it was suggested by one devout student (of theology), on Tuesday, that they should pick up the pavement and wreck the shop. Another (medicine), with a three months' moustache—already visible in certain lights—actually entered one of the compartments and interviewed the young man presiding, issuing thence after a genuine but not very marked sacrifice to inform his companions that *she* had definitely gone. Joseph received several offers to have his eye blackened, but closed with none.

At rehearsal, Zoë had little time to think of her action, and to feel the shame she should have felt, but during the mornings, when she was free, she suffered some sharp pricks in her conscience. She realised that she had shown no consideration, and that, however bad Joseph might be, Martha at any rate deserved better at her hands.

"I want Mr Joseph," was all she could say, when she summoned up enough courage to go to the shop.

He was brought; he was kind, but very formal; Martha came out and stared unfeelingly. "Put on

your hat and come out," Zoë cried in desperation to him. In out-door attire he was, save for his hair, quite the gentleman.

Zoë found speech easier with him alone. "When are you going to be married?" she asked him bluntly.

"In Autumn," he informed her.

"May I come back for the mornings till then?" she begged. "For I am not going to come out until she——." The knowledge that she should come out when Miss Tauzy should, as it were, go in, was before them both, but they did not mention it. He was delighted, and in the busy street wrung her hand most fondly. The pair returned, in gay disorder, to Martha. Zoë was formally reinstated over the midday meal, and she tripped away to the theatre for her practice with a light heart and the consciousness of doing what was right for once.

For the first time in her life she began to study with assiduity, going every afternoon to rehearsal. The rest the passive occupation of the morning gave her was sorely needed. The praises that once-more-happy students and loungers gave her through the window was like balm to her after the horrors of the blame her ignorance of dancing called down on her head in the afternoons.

She was to be a boy in the Ballet. Poetry was the forte of the manager, even as the training of dancers was the strong point of his basso-profondo. That corpulent Italian, his nether limbs stretched in dark blue tights, led the bevy of girls about the practice

room, his insteps and ankles as flexible as those of any there. The manager dropped in at intervals to shout directions from afar, like a referee; the pug-faced young man played on or stopped as if he had been wound up; he stared about the room as Zoë moved, enough to disconcert her seriously.

The manager, as we have divulged to you, was a poet. He invented the Ballet himself, even to its title,

THE HONEY BOY,

and we must tell you that he had an idea that bees are as yellow as their produce. But that apart, the notion was really very pretty. After an elaborate series of kicks and thumpings from the rounded legs of the corps, Zoë was to whirl in, with her hair down, dance awhile, and then trip from flower to flower like a bee, sipping a kiss from each one. There were to be roses and lilies alternately, with green legs and white or red tops, their heads crowned with velvet flowers of huge size. At practice the beauty of the conception did not appear, for the flowers had on their practice skirts, very smutty ones, and some of them were dirty round their necks. Moreover, to any but a poet's eye, the stalks of the wayward blossoms (who were to sway to and fro while the Honey Boy danced about them) would have looked like excessively stout legs, particularly when their presence was emphasised by grass-green hose. But we who say these things are cavillers, and no poets. Campobossi thought, with his manager, that it was lovely; but he didn't share, at first, the hopes

that that good man had of Zoë. "She's as thin as an Englishman," he grumbled.

"Not she! English are all splay-footed. Besides, listen to her accent!" said his manager.

The robustious singer returned to his Terpsichorean tuition somewhat reassured. The Honey-Boy's thinness, testified to as Belgian, became a beauty. The slightest accent of English in her speech would have made Campobossi her life-long enemy. The unconscious Briton toiled after him in his steps, too intent on his amazing legs and feet to notice his absorption.

There were afternoons when her limbs seemed made of thread, so feeble did she find herself when faced with long *attitudes*—or when after turning her dizzied eyes from Campobossi's muscular legs, which spun and darted and bent and disappeared and looked like one or twelve as he gyrated, her own felt like two sand-bags, over which she had no control. He could walk on his toes round the edge of a crown piece, and Zoë, for all her youth and elasticity, could scarcely circle a small plate. She would follow him slavishly from one end of the room to the other, moved to stifled laughter at the girlish poise of his huge body, to suppressed tears of weariness as her aching toes went their one, two, three-ee-ee, four, one, two, three-ee-ee, four. But she dared not smile; his neck was as flexible as his legs; he could turn his face almost round to his back in a flash. Nor dared she cry: he stormed at her for her sulky expression, or, worse still, sighed and waited drumming his fingers until she had done, which she speedily had, when she saw the stares that Pian-piano

gave her from his position at the silent instrument. She was not allowed her own quaint movements. She was forced to go through the practice with the whole row of girls, new and old, knowing and green, she one of the greenest. But when the general lesson was over, and the others were free to go whither they liked and to rest their stretched limbs, she was kept at it, parading, marching, turning, twisting and standing, until she had forgotten the monotony of the shared lesson in the *corvée* of the private one.

If Campobossi had a fault, and we have discovered he had, like a few other people, it was his want of command of his tongue, and strangely enough this was enheightened by his powerful command of language. He had some of the strangest oaths that have ever delighted an angry man, and from day to day, as he had the training of Miss Caxe in his sole charge, he added to them. His wife was hardened to them, but she feared for Zoë; and at first the girl shrank, amazed and hurt, from the volley of curses, never directed at her, but rather at circumstances or at himself. Soon, she grew to like the undercurrent of grumble, lost her fear of the grumbler; then she noticed that the girls had ceased to giggle, she had hated them for their spite. Next she began to feel that she could trust herself not to topple over in the middle of a *scena* and not to groan with pain as she pirouetted. She assumed a smile at practice, recognised that her arms and legs were her limbs, not she their victim. She grew hardy, introducing her skips and wild turns into the regular steps; uutil she had known the dismal routine of the

one, two, three-ee-ee, four, these innovations had been sternly repressed; as she grew in proficiency, she was allowed her elaborations.

There came days when Pian-piano shouted "Bravo!" Then days when the manager strolling in, clapped. At last a day when Campobossi bowed himself away at the end of the room and left her to finish her dance alone—more, he asked, in return to a question of her eyes, that she would be pleased to teach *him*. She knew no more restraint; the movements which she had so painfully acquired now were as natural as breathing to her; she could set to them what other fancies she had, whatever flutters she chose to invent. The Ballet came into serious consideration, Zoë was given the centre of the stage; the dirty practice room was left behind, they trod the actual boards where they were to shine later. The other artistes stationed themselves about the empty theatre, the whole orchestra turned up, the manager ran from the stage to the auditorium and back again until he had to remove his collar for comfort. Miss Tauzy, who had strolled in to get off her superior smile, went out in the middle, the muscles of her face not having been exercised. This was, as the mildest and most modest would have felt, a great triumph, and no wonder that the new Ballet was billed at once.

Zoë had the added satisfaction of seeing the little name largely written on the theatre placards, which she met in odd corners of the town, thrusting their bloated letters into the quiet of respectable and non-theatre-going streets.

THE HONEY BOY
WORLD'S "*ZOË*" DANCER
WORLD'S FIRST DANCER
"ZOË"
WITH CORPS DE BALLET.

The novelty of the title was to make the town flock —though they would have flocked to anything new in the way of amusement. "Honey Boy?" they inquired of each other, and rejoiced at the final positively last appearance of Miss Tauzy. She had a grand farewell and received several flesh wounds from the massive bouquets that came too straight. She regretted her departure, except for the fact that Joseph was a little tired of waiting. This great success into which she was galvanised at the very end of her career should compensate that gentleman for the weariness of his patience.

Fickle Brussels! Not one of those who had given the Tauzy a "send-off" omitted to come the next night to shout Zoë in. What did it matter to them whether the lady was the first dancer in Europe, or the world? They must be amused of an evening, and that they meant to be, whatever the quality of the amusement.

Zoë had now so often danced to the empty house that she hated the idea of going on to the stage; the noise of the girls' steps would not leave her ears when she was away from the practice; she disliked the huge, dusty hall with its holland-covered seats. But tripping on when the place was crammed to breathlessness with

eager onlookers, she found it not only less formidable but exhilarating even. So excited and unsophisticated was she, that she did not notice the disappointment which overran the crowd. Belgian æsthetes had been ready, gloved or bare hands in position, to applaud until the place was thick with dust; at first sight of her slim form they let drop their hands, and some their lower jaws, and the ovation was deferred *sine die.* What of that? she had expected the silence she got, and she would have failed before the enthusiastic applause of people who would not have justly known why they clapped her. The music was there; the Ballet was there; the convent was behind; life was in front of her. She was alone in her content—the Ballet had gone on with the idea that this was to be *the* night of their lives; they visibly sulked; as for the manager's heart-beats, they would have startled a hardened physician for the first five minutes.

It was gorgeous, she felt, to skip and twirl and twist before this gaping, silent crowd. She turned and laughed joy at the brawny girls behind her in their phalanx; recovering her senses, she went through the dance gaily, freeing herself of all thoughts save the one that *she was there*; her hair stood out in a line like a wheel above her head. The audience had begun, certainly to get enthusiastic, slightly, after the first sight of that hair; the first steps of her own inventing moved them more; as she went on wildly, she dragged murmurs of admiration after her; the speechlessness of disapproval deepened in some parts of the hall into the silence of intense enjoyment. The delighted on-

lookers could not see her for her hair, could not see her hair for her. It dropped in fine disorder; she threw it back from her face with a vigorous arm and tripped from flower to flower, a circle of light following her about the stage, the orchestra ceasing for the moment, while she kissed; the action and the complete silence broke up the quiet of the enthralled audience. Murmurs deepened at the restart of the music, and voices joined the busy instruments; some shouts arose. Gay acclamations roared above the orchestra; a single voice cleared above all the other noises cried that Zoë had forgotten to kiss its owner. "No favourites!" the cry was taken up. "I'm a flower, I am!" "I shall complain to the manager." "Do the whole garden, Zoë!" "Be fair, now," she heard with astonishment. She finished her dance as much to the time of Pian-piano's wagging head—he saw her difficulty—as to the music, for the noise had drowned it, even on her side of the footlights. Down she sank, until her locks lay like a folded cloak on the floor around her, rose, sent a kiss to the whole hall, and disappeared. The Ballet thumped themselves out to four time, quite content.

The manager's heart needed no exhibition of digitalis. He preserved a quiet air that disconcerted Miss. "Very well, very well," he said, and repeated the words and the tone to each member of the Ballet. "Let them roar a little," was his next remark, sent as a message to the orchestra, "until you get your breath." The players rubbed their necks inside their collars and dried the mouth-pieces of their instruments. In the

interval notes began to be brought round, cards were handed to Zoë—she was bewildered. The manager came to her rescue. "Oh, burn the lot! What do you say, Amalia?" To her he explained that it was a way Brussels had, when it was excited; Amalia asked as a favour that no one should come behind yet. She went on to speak of the way to treat such notes and the people who sent them; Zoë listened airily, until she heard her name piped for her recall. The house bellowed, and she realised that the sweetness of glory is the prerogative of the worshipper. She had had her triumph, and the rest was her living to get. But she was glad, as also was Campobossi, who had, in her first movement, when the house had been so quiet, nearly wrung his hands to pieces. She had arrived at as unassailable a position as Cæsar's, and almost as quickly as he had boasted.

Campobossi and Amalia saw her home; where she hopped up to her room and into bed and slept as sweetly as she had ever done at St Nytouche's, while young (and old) Brussels was hymning her praise and pouring out libations (down its own throat) to her sudden glory. The cafés found a run in wines of yellow tint, smooth and sweet—the manager's poetry had not been wasted on æsthetic Brussels. Even he had not thought of the busy city drinking wine to match her hair.

When she danced after that first night, the reception was always one of great noise, but she never minded. She knew now that she was there, as her fancy told her, and that she would stop there.

Flowers began to arrive at the theatre; sent forthwith

to the Hospital conveniently at hand ; this was Amalia's idea. Three-cornered notes, sealed letters, cyphered envelopes were brought at every performance, returned unopened by the messengers ; the servants in the theatre were given orders to carry none round.

Lalage and her young man came to see. Cassis, the attendant swain, pretended to admire prodigiously, but bulk was his beau ideal of beauty in woman. He had certainly preferred the Tauzy, who had approached his notions of real beauty very closely, but he wisely said nothing about that. A man at Lalage's side was wondering how the dooce the girl kept her wig on.

"A wig, sir!" Lalage broke in impulsively. "That's her own lovely hair!"

"Her own hair? Oh, I say, you know, but no one's got hair like that."

"No one else has, that's true," said Lalage. "There isn't such another crop on earth."

"How do you know?" she was asked, and in return asked him if he had never looked in Joseph's window.

"Why, I say, she can't be that hairdresser's model, can she?"

"Indeed she can," declared Lalage, and might have said much more but that Cassis led her away to prevent it.

The news got about. Joseph's shop was as thronged as ever. The town rushed thither for the Infallible, now rather languishing. Joseph had the wit to order five thousand labels with a slightly altered title: ZOE'S Infallible. Brother Frederic was perhaps the only man who did not spend a few francs on a bottle.

He had passed the shop and noted the defection of the principal attraction, but his tastes did not warrant his going in to purchase anything that he might inquire; and it was chance alone that brought Zoë almost to a stop in her pirouette when she saw his rosy countenance on the far side of the footlights.

Perhaps you will wonder how this holy man came to be in a place so professedly secular as a music hall. Doesn't his very presence there, and that of some of his colleagues, prove beyond dispute that that entertainment was all that the management claimed for it—refined, classical, pure, select?

When Zoë entered, his Reverence watched her enchanted. A minute passed, he was ravished; two minutes, he began to doubt; a third, and something jogged his brain: perhaps it was the straw-coloured tights she had worn at the breaking-up, which he most certainly recognised; perhaps it was the sunny hair he had known and admired for many a year: at any rate, his mind gave a leap and ran backwards and forwards. The seconds ticked out another minute, their insidious voice drowned by the scrape and puff of music.

"Pirouette, do you?" said Brother Frederic. "I'll pirouette across to the Convent after this, or I'm a Dutchman," which being Flemish, he very nearly was. And at the close of the performance he did go across to the Convent: not pirouetting however, his age, size, and calling combining against this graceful form of ambulation.

To his breathless account Sister Superior nodded in

a dreadfully imposing manner. "It shall be stopped," was her edict. "Stopped it shall be."

"How?" said her Confessor, who was beginning to wish he hadn't been in such a hurry.

"How?" echoed the Sister Superior with scorn. Then on a different tone, "Well, how would *you*?"

"I shouldn't," said Brother Frederic. "I just thought I'd mention it, that's all. Peace with you, my dear Sister."

"Wouldn't?" gasped his dear Sister.

"Why should you?" said the nervous Brother. "Her case was always a difficult one. She's suited to this twirligig twiddly kind of business. Now if it were Sister Joy or one of the novices——"

"Sister Joy what?"

"Kicking her legs about, I mean, it would be one's clear duty to interfere."

"I certainly should interfere," said Sister Superior, with difficulty.

"And very rightly, my dear Sister," pursued our tactless cleric. "But as it's only Zoë, I say let the girl alone. It's one way of making a living, like another. Better," he added, "than some others."

"We are not," said Sister Superior, "discussing the ramifications of the subject. I say it should be stopped."

"You know best," the Brother said politely. "Peace with you."

"And with you."

"To the pleasure of seeing you again," said he, and came out, speculative. "*I really am an old woman*," he

speculated, "*she looked very charming. Tush! Why, if she'd gone to the altar with that gosling Cari-Pède, I'd never have forgiven myself. It'd be monstrous.*"

That was very old history. The rejected swain, as we know, had taken to his glass of beer of an evening again.

Chapter X

is parenthetically descriptive

SISTER SUPERIOR retired with her news, digested it in private, considered it from all sides, and decided to ignore the matter entirely. Not a word of her knowledge should she breathe to her Sisters: their innocency should not be harmed by the slightest knowledge of Zoë's defection. Brother Frederic had wisely advised; silence was the only weapon with which to overcome Apollyon in this pass. Let the Sisterhood not stir one finger to exhort, prevent, or repudiate the girl, and who was to know that she ever issued from their modest doors? After a few private lamentations very quietly performed, Sister Superior returned to her juniors, dismissing, as best she might, the matter from her mind.

Zoë therefore stayed undisturbed. The Brother returned, not once, but often, while she awaited the thunder of Conventual wrath.

Meeting him in the street, Zoë would nod and smile again. She sought him out in his little office, though it meant for her a long walk past any number of churches, and confessed, to his attentive ear, her little charming sins. He sighed plaintively at the sound of her voice, having no need to peep behind the green curtain to establish her identity; he felt that she was too much for him. Priestcraft saved him not.

He absolved her grudgingly, piled up the penances on the slightest provocation, became a harsh and unjust confessor. The penitent was absolutely lamb-like ; she would trot away with her dose of penances, get through it, and come back with more sins—such trivial sins. Brother Frederic reflected that we all have to earn our Paradise ; not age and infirmity are the heaviest crosses.

She was entirely blithe : penance was a joy to her ; she would have enjoyed pain, so full of life was she. Every minute of her busy day was a pleasure to her, even the bad minutes. Life held all wonders, all delights, all bliss untasted yet : she travelled her youth with her great happiness.

Her theatrical triumph alone, though it was a triumph, was not the chief cause of her constant rejoicing. The world of the music-hall brought her more friends, and to her, friendship was, after life, the greatest good. She lived for love ; if the objects of her sincere affection were little worthy of it, why, so much the more generous she.

The manager became one of her allies ; out of the wings he was a mild creature, hardened and furious only during rehearsal. Then he might well be dreaded : Jove-like in his wrath he became, and even Zoë quailed before him. Long pale whiskers, that flowed unscissored from his cheeks, gave him in repose a melancholic look. He derived a nickname from them : Zoë found herself invited to drop the Mister and call him Whiskers for short ; it was a mark of favour. She did so, trying to pronounce the name deferentially. It amazed and troubled her exceedingly to note the air her manager

took, in suaver moments, with the girls—young ladies, we should say—of the ballet. He was disgustingly familiar, and not he only. Pian-piano—every man on the stage—rallied them with vulgar familiarity. A longer acquaintance with the ladies had resolved Zoë that they led up to it and fully expected it. Her they treated civilly, in good fellowship, but without coarseness. She was given a room alone, over which Peggy, when sober, presided with dignity.

When sober. When otherwise that dresser had a way of strolling mysteriously off; whither, Zoë was long in learning. It transpired later that the lady had a brother, whom vocation had enclosed in the Fraternity; to him she wandered when the mood was on her, and the secularity of dressing rooms and fleshings had no attraction for her. Of Zoë's small dressing-room, Peggy alone was free. There were times when potations too soon overcame her, and she could not achieve her visit to the distant Fraternity. On such occasions she crept to Zoë's little chamber and sank dozily in the most comfortable corner. Zoë tried vainly to make her understand that she would have no dealings with her unless she were sober. Peggy vowed she'd never touch another drop. It became a regular recurring scene. When at times she slumbered cosily in Zoë's room, our damsel would slip off to the larger room where the girls dressed. She hated to go among them; they were coarse and unashamed. With alarm she noted evidences of unseemly chatter; it is certain that her presence checked the girls: they believed her to be a lady and priggish. When the door closed after her, the talk resumed was more than coarse.

Among the perils of theatre life, Zoë had found a friend, the "Caramalia," wife to the *basso profondo.* She was one of those fortunate creatures who keep their personal attractions to the very limit of old age. In middle life she was handsome enough to inspire passions galore. The circumstance did not affect her: all her affection was settled on the gigantic Campobossi. They worshipped each other. "That angel Amalia," and "that dear old silly, Campobossi," were their means of reference to each other. She had for him besides her adoration a motherly care. Campobossi, pirouetting in navy-blue tights, roaring the songs of Brigands and Pirates in opera, howling the words of Prophets in Oratorios, was always her dear child, her boy, her lad Pipi. With the most tender solicitude, she would wrap his obese form in her own cloak, when he came off heated from taking the low G; and with courteous bow he would wear it, kissing her hand gallantly as she hooked it about him. Every roar he emitted was celestial music to her ears; every movement she made was cherubic motion to his eyes.

Amalia confirmed Zoë in the belief that, as she wanted to be treated in the theatre, so she would be. "No one can protect you like yourself," she assured her. And so the girl discovered. No man assailed her: she possessed a purifying innocence, that prevented, of itself, offence.

A vaguely sentimental air hung about pug-faced Pian-piano; he stared calf-like at her as she danced; but custom staled his basilisk eye. Frequently he asked if he might walk home with her; she firmly refused. If he brought flowers, as she believed, they

were sent with all others to the Hospital. Admirers were speedily cured of that system by her drastic remedy. If he sent notes, they were at once returned, and without comment.

So inoffensive was he, for all his moonishness, that she related her part of the affair to Lalage with some regret.

"But he does stare so," she reiterated, at points in the narration.

"I wish," sighed Lalage, "someone'd stare at me!"

"Well, don't they?"

"Men, I mean," Lalage said with comfortable regret.

"You don't."

"Oh, don't I, just? They're not half so gentlemanly and all that sort of thing, the fellows I know."

"I thought you were engaged," Zoë coldly suggested.

"So I am," returned the buxom creature calmly. 'I forgot. I mean before Cassis' time." Zoë shook her head gravely. "I don't want you to imagine," Lalage went on bovinely, "that I encourage 'em, Zozo, I don't suppose I should, you know, but I should like to have that deferential kind of attention paid to me. Pian-piano must think loads of you."

Zoë kept her further information to herself. Lalage had mistaken the mood: she was not quick to seize subtleties; sentimentality was not the tone; she had been wrongly impressed.

Meanwhile, Zoë danced, was applauded, danced again; summer drew out, she skipped before the foreigners (we were all distinguished in those days, and never went abroad without our couriers) who thronged the town at that season. Miss Tauzy, at the same time,

was buying rich attire in excess; when autumn tinctured the leaves, Zoë also procured a dress and, clad in it, stood behind that lady and Joseph at the altar. There was, as you note, complete amity between the two; and as the proprietress of the establishment the late Tauzy could allow Joseph to dower our young lady with a set of magnificent tortoiseshell combs. which he handed her in a private interview with Martha, just as they used to be. The compliments fitted the magnificence of the gift, and moved Zoë to a plethora of sentiment; she left the shop with tears running down her cheeks, and went so far as to kiss the combs before trying their effect in her dainty tresses. It was not wholly on account of Joseph that she did so. The girl was for the while all heart; partings melted her; she had an enormous capacity for loving. She would have kissed you or me at that moment. If only we hear you sigh (and we echo your exhalation), if only we'd been there!

Chapter XI

begins promisingly with the Fates but descends to mortals

THE Fates looked with disdain on the monotony of such a life. Pleasant mornings, pleasant afternoons, pleasant nights were woven *ad nauseam* into the texture of Zoë's days. No sombre tint relieved the sameness of the equable shade, no thread of gold was interwoven: the stuff was pure homespun, unworthy of their loom. Out went their grey old hands for new threads, and they found one, tangled it marvellously about, and wrought it into the fabric of her life.

The unconscious She sat at her mending in her little bedroom. She rented the parlour in these brighter days, but as often as not she preferred to sit on the bed, with her feet on the chair, and breathe the fumes of the slow combustion stove, rather than to loll in ease in the florid furniture of the best apartment. With feet upraised and the solitary chair piled with furbelows in need of stitches, she sewed diligently. The appearance of Lalage was unexpected: it was Cassis' evening to meet her in the park. The rendezvous was a bi-weekly event: Zoë knew time and place exactly.

However, here was Lalage, and Lalage was cross. She had been waiting for Cassis for quarter of an hour, and he had not even then arrived. She kicked her heels together and frowned at Zoë.

"I think he's a wretch," said she.

"Making me wait. Who ever heard——?

"I hate dangling about——

"'S a man's place to wait, not a lady's. And the Park is so draughty."

Zoë was wisely dumb. She had never seen Lalage roused to annoyance before.

"I hope he's there now, waiting for me. The last time I'll go out with the horrid fellow.

"I do despise anyone unpunctual.

"Catch me marrying a laggard." She took another look at her watch.

"I only hope there's nothing the matter. I don't remember ever having to wait before.

"The warehouse shuts at five. He's never been detained.

"I do hope the poor fellow hasn't got hurt.

"I don't know his address or I'd go——

"*Why can't you say something, you moonstruck dancer, you?*"

"I expect he's waiting for you now, Lalage," said Zoë, thus adjured.

"If you were me——"

"I'd go," Zoë declared.

"You only say that because you want to get rid of me. I'd like to see myself on the run after a fellow who always keeps me waiting an hour"; saying which, she titivated her hair at Zoë's glass, shook herself neat, and went away. Half an hour later, Zoë, issuing into the street on her easy way to the theatre, came upon her hurrying distractedly towards her room.

"Oh, Zoë, he hasn't come!" she cried, weeping the while. "It's nearly an hour now. What can I do?"

"We'll go to the warehouse," said Zoë. "You know which it is, don't you?"

The porter at the warehouse assured them that Cassis had left with the other workers; he gave them his home address: weeping Lalage and comforting Zoë hurried thither. It was as the girl had feared: Cassis had been hurt on his homeward way by a falling ladder. A gentleman had taken him in his carriage to a doctor's and thence home. The gentleman was with him now. Cassis, bound about the head, was lying on a long chair before the window, half dazed. Lalage was all sorrow at seeing him in pain. Zoë talked apart with the Samaritan stranger.

"I shall look in again later," he told her, his accent betraying his origin from perfidious Albion. "But I think the young lady should not wait. He was advised to rest."

Zoë took her off, thanking him earnestly. A clock pointed three minutes before the hour: Zoë was due on the stage at a quarter past, and the young man's lodging was quite that distance from the theatre. She cried good-bye to Lalage, bowed to the Englishman, who had come down behind them, and ran off fleet-foot without a word of excuse. Lalage understood her hurry, and took her time comfortably to explain it to the stranger, as she thanked him for his care of her lover.

Zoë, fleeing gazelle-like through the streets, was overtaken by the carriage which had borne Cassis to his lodging. At the earnest invitation of the gentleman to mount beside him, she jumped in and was rapidly driven to the theatre. She was really grateful: her

countryman's manner was so kind, his actions so charitable, his disposition so thoughtful, that she felt a glow of patriotic pride. Unaware of her nationality, he felt a certain pride also in his lovely companion. He noticed her beauty sidelong with immense complacency. A charitable deed is truly its own reward.

It is well that we are not given to moralising, and that you ask for no homily, otherwise should we by now be plunged head-over-heels in a morass of the most metaphysical ponderings, whence good luck and a Providence that shapes our ends alone could drag us. Well is it also that we court not the Muse, for did we so, Olympic invocations with reference to the amazing chance that brings one character face to face with another had filled more than one page of this story. O wondrous Fates, at whose behest——! we might have begun, and the Devil himself couldn't have stopped us. Mythology piecemeal invoked, we should have exploited every abstraction possible; we should have made nouns of the potential moods of all the auxiliary verbs and used them in the vocative. Exclamation marks would have starred the page, capital letters overflowed. Our heroine and her adventures would have been separately brought in, in the ablative absolute, and carefully recapitulated, each in a synopsis of ten words. We might have outdone the eighteenth century for sentiment and the twentieth for typography.

But the story proceeds calmly *sans* pyrotechnics. Ungarnished prose relates plain facts. Our heroine loves and sighs (in the proper place) within the limits of a paragraph.

Lalage knew very little of metaphysics, much of life;

she was of that retrograde sex that believes in instinct. She fostered an inexplicable antagonism which her Zozo's countryman had aroused in her primordial soul. She was grateful: no one, to quote her frequent asseveration, could be more so; but she had cordially wished Cassis's rescuer were another. What other she did not stipulate; any other, probably; the instrument of Providence, duly thanked for in prayers and offerings, was disliked for himself. Progress loses heart dejectedly in face of such primitiveness: that the nineteenth century should, could contain so superstitious and hysterical a being was of itself amazing. Lalage, as matters stood, considered herself by unseen agency marked as the enemy of the Englishman: she accepted the situation reverently. Persuasion and reasoning were equally useless: she intended to dislike, and like she wouldn't, though Cassis talked himself hoarse. Subsequent interviews served to strengthen the obstinate creature in her distrust. She communicated it promptly to Zoë. The recipient of these unsought confidences listened in calm; she also revelled in the luxury of instinct; her heart had not quailed before her compatriot. She put the prejudice down to anti-British feeling in her friend. It certainly was misplaced prejudice.

To the Englishman Cassis owed his safety and the speed of his recovery. The gentleman's name, printed in neat script on the most delicate of pasteboard, was Wychthwaite. Zoë alone of the group to whom this card was shown with awe, coped with this ineuphonious jumble. Nameless by reason of his unpronounceability, he was nevertheless the good fairy in the household of the

young workman. He read to him, played chess with him, took him driving, used his influence at the warehouse with the glowing result that Cassis did not lose his employment, and in short was the very essence of good Samaritanism. Everybody had to admit that, even the mentally undeveloped Lalage. Grudgingly she did admit it, recounting his kindness, affability, generosity, and thoughtfulness with belittling comment to our silent Zoë. She laughed, it is true, at Lalage's struggle with the name which she, in sure proof of Anglo-Saxon origin, tripped easily over. Lalage and Cassis met it with the respect and unwillingness that characterise the true Mussulman in respect of another name: they as scrupulously avoided it. Not talismanic, it had yet a subtle force and poetic charm that his *protégés* could not deny. It evoked from Campobossi an honest sigh.

"If only I could pronounce it," he was wont to wish, "what a lovely curse it would make."

He was, alas! unable to pronounce it. His performance on that mysterious line of letters was entirely innocuous. A baby might have heard it, unmoved. Zoë went on her way between the fiery breathings of Lalage's suspicions and Campobossi's vain endeavours. Cassis was recovering. Greater things were afoot.

Chapter XII

is genteel

CASSIS was not the only invalid, or the most interesting.

Zoë had, within the earlier days of his illness, received a summons to the bedside of no less a person than Claire, her beloved Claire of the convent. If the friendship between the two in school-girl days had been something general, it had also been sincere: that it had lapsed is not to be wondered at. After the term had closed and Zoë had tripped, as we have seen, out upon life's road with her hair and her small black trunk, to make her way alone, Miss Burmance had been carried off (we had almost said "translated") in a grand carriage to her home, of which every member was in office at court. That shelter she had almost immediately left to go to a husband, whose position was as high as hers. She moved in a circle of wealth and aristocracy.

The convent was, for her, closed for ever. She was not known to express chagrin. A girl's friendships are apt to die a natural death when the woman supersedes the child. Claire had at times thought lovingly of Zoë, without, however, making any effort to find her. At length the fat letters that shouted the tiny name aloud in the public streets obtruded on her notice. She wondered, sent a friend to the theatre, heard about the hair, and was convinced. Then and there she would

have summoned her friend to her, but for a more intimate event which fell about this time. When the dancer was sent for, Claire was thought to be at the point of death: a child, five days old, healthy and beautiful, lay at her side; the young mother gazed on it with tears. It was to solicit Zoë's care for this little one she had sent for her.

"I always have loved you, Zoë," she said. "How often I've thought of you and your clever fingers when I was sewing my baby's tiny clothes! When I began to feel so ill, it was to you my heart and mind both turned. I want you to look after her, when I'm gone. I should die happier if I thought you would, Zoë."

Zoë fondled the little child in tears; its dimples and rosiness delighted her. She undertook the charge with a strange new feeling of responsibility: the soft hand that clung to her or Claire's finger impartially made her tremble with joy. She felt her heart stirring wildly within her for love of the bonny child.

She kissed Claire.

"My dear," she whispered, "you can't die when you look at this sweet mite——"

Claire looked and looked, the idea appealed to her: she pondered, sighed, smiled, and thenceforward grew strong. The rosy baby was not to be motherless.

Zoë became her devout sponsor, undertaking the temporary charge of her infantile soul. As baby's godmother, you may imagine if she was restored to her old place as Claire's intimate. Claire might know a dancer (that is Art), but there was no speech of putting Lalage again into her friendship—a shop is low. Moreover, Miss Caxe might be anyone—ducal, regal blood

might flow in her veins; about Miss Cari-Pède there was no hopeful doubt: commerce had borne and bred her, in commerce she moved and had her being. Claire once had liked her well: the matter was distinctly of the past. She asked for news of her, heard, commended, shrugged her broad shoulders and inwardly despised.

The society of Claire's house was exceedingly pleasant to Zoë. The adoring husband, the young mother, the delicious baby were all beloved of her. Theatre friends appeared coarse and uncivilised in comparison with them; theatre surroundings hideous by the comfort and elegance of Claire's house. It stood in a tiny park, some distance from the city; an agreeable open walk led to it, shortened and made pleasanter by paths across fields. The way soon became familiar to Zoë, who had exploited all the short cuts and possible differentiations of route in half-a-dozen walks. She trod it often, playing with the rosy child when she awoke from her afternoon's sleep, or reading to Claire, very piously, from highly recommended books of devotion. Together these earnest young women discussed points of doctrine and religious education by the hour, all with a view to the unconscious infant's training.

Claire grew well enough to share the exuberant delight of "bathing baby"; when she was quite restored, the little one fell ill. Fever oppressed it; in all its unharming babyhood it was tormented; through the quiet afternoons that Zoë spent at its side, she could hear its short, sharp breathings, until all nature seemed to listen to that token of pain. Prayer was stayed on

her lips as she watched the tiny breast rising and falling rapidly; it appeared that the great gods must sleep while such things were suffered. Continually Zoë trod that path, to comfort Claire, who could not pray, could not think, could do even nothing. Against her will the girl seemed drawn to her friend in her trouble; though she experienced every mental torture being with her, yet she could not keep away.

Day after day, as she had watched Claire, she watched the child grow into convalescence, and thence, but slowly, slowly into health. Her happiness returned; rare joys, of seeing the bright eyes flutter to a glance, became frequent; now its cheek grew round, then rosy; its grasp was close and strong. Zoë found prayer loosened on her lips. If no supplications were sent in the hour of greatest anguish to the Powers, they at any rate got the credit from these devout folk of having accomplished the child's restoration.

Zoë was commended also by the parents. "If it hadn't been for you," became a common phrase: a great sigh, for the most part, finished the sentence. Zoë adored the baby in public, in private she built it a shrine in her innermost heart, whither her purest and gentlest thoughts only were free to stray. It was the first child she had ever nursed in her arms or kissed. The soft strength of its hands held her irresistibly.

Chapter XIII

contains an advantageous appearance

AFTERNOON journeyings to the baby and back again had left Zoë little time for anything else. The theatre claimed her evenings; rehearsals, never by the careful manager allowed to lapse, occupied her mornings. She discovered herself cut off from an older friend. Lalage had called at her room several times, found Zoë consistently absent, and went no more. She knew nothing of Claire's reappearance, but she was swift to realise, when at length she heard of it, that friendship cannot survive the counter.

Zoë heard of her visits, was remorseful and ashamed of herself for neglecting the sweet dear. Lalage had always been good to her; how her family in earlier days had treated Zoë, we very well know. Lalage might be vulgar, most decidedly was, in speech and manner; but she was very kind, and Zoë, with a blush, remembered, before Claire had stooped to regain her friendship, she herself had been very glad of Lalage's.

"Dear me!" she said in the solitude of her tiny bedroom. "I behave shabbily to every one I know." She wrote to ask her friend to a supper-party after her turn at the theatre; fritters, macaroons, and coffee to make up the concrete part of it, girl's chatter to supply everything else.

The hour arriving, Zoë went to the boulevard. A

bleak wind was sweeping the road free of all save the necessitous. Few loungers would face such a blast. Every breath of it, every sound of it told of coming snow; it pierced warm shawls and skirts, going with icy deliberation straight to the marrow of one's bones. The ill-clad hung in blue misery in the mean shelter of walls and trees. The hungry braved the wind and gathered with nipped hands n tattered pockets, before the windows of cook-shops.

Zoë heartily wished she had been less punctual: every second was emphasised by a cold puff that lifted her shawl or whistled round her feet: her bonnet rose and fell, her eyes closed to the bitterness of the air. A doorway offered partial shelter; she stood within, hugging her garments about her and stamping her feet. At the sight of Lalage speedily approaching, she waved genially without leaving her quiet haven. The girl passed swiftly, unseeing, on the outside of the pavement. Zoë darted out to intercept her, but Lalage went so fast and so straight that she could not gain on her. Zoë perceived that she was not the only person trying to overtake the blue cloak; between her and the fleet-footed girl two young men kept their place, obviously in pursuit. Zoë ran a few steps and arrived close behind them. The almost empty Boulevard was well suited to brisk walking: no leisured crowds hindered the passage of the quartette.

From her position Zoë could hear the conversation of the two men; they were English, and, to judge from their tone, gentlemen; their voices betrayed education; their present occupation, leisure and its usual concomitant. Zoë understood Lalage's headlong flight.

She hoped vainly to tire her persecutors or to throw them off by taking to the quiet streets of the south. She feared above all things to slacken speed or to turn aside; she was possessed, Daphne-like, by the instinct of dread. Under her breath, she whispered continually her lover's name.

The hounds in pursuit laughed and joked. Zoë heard them discussing whether they should "tire the buxom beauty out or catch her up." They decided to do the former. Zoë foresaw the end of the chase in the darker and less frequented streets of the south, whither Lalage in uncalculating terror still led the way. She determined that the chase should not end thus. Running again, the more wildly urged on, since they had left the gas-lit shops behind and were in darker ways, she reached Lalage's side. The hurry was at an end. Together the girls turned to face the men and tried to make their way back. The situation was desperate.

"Aha, my beauties!" cried one. "Two of you are there? All right, one each!"

"Let the scraggy one go," his companion said, in Zoë's mother-tongue. The insult heartened her; she was in no danger herself. So much the better, she held for it both. She did not dare to cry for help; such an appeal might bring upon them more offenders.

"Let us go!" she cried in English.

"English! by all that's lovely!" said the one who had called her scraggy.

"Let the girls go, you cads," said another voice, and the two cowards fell back. Zoë and Lalage, with never

a word for their rescuer, fled hand in hand, far from the scene of their danger.

Safe in Zoë's room, Lalage took breath. "Did you see who it was?" she asked.

"Was?"

"The one who saved us."

"Not I," said Zoë; "I shouldn't care if it was the Old Gentleman himself, so long as we got away."

"You don't care!" Lalage repeated with round eyes.

"Not a jot," Miss Caxe declared; "why should I? Bless you! Men are our natural protectors, aren't they?"

"Humph! I'd be sorry to trust all of 'em," said Lalage, fresh from her experience of man. They munched fritters speculatively; their appetites had not been impaired by the fright.

"It was viche-viche, I give it up," Lalage at last resumed between bites.

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked Zoë.

"Our defender. Our saviour."

"What about him?"

"Viche, you know W-y-c-h, St Joseph knows how it goes on. I don't," Lalage said.

Zoë turned a rosy face to the fire. "Mr Wychthwaite."

"Yes. It's a mystery how you get that out of it."

"I thought I knew the voice," she commented with her mouth full.

"He's nice, if ever anyone was," she went on, after a pause.

"Those devils were English," Lalage cried viciously. "I hate your countrymen, Zozo."

"Mr Wychthwaite is my countryman," declared Zoë.

The information did not apparently alter Lalage's feeling toward our race. "It takes all sorts to make —the English," she pronounced at last.

Chapter XIV

shows how a proverb is put into practice

IT was, as any decent person will admit, only civil in Miss Caxe, when by chance she met Mr Wychthwaite outside the town, to allow him (at his own request) to walk with her. She believed it fell about by chance. The truth of the matter was that he had followed her on several occasions to Claire's house or homewards, in the hope of her recognising him. No doubt she would have done so, had he not prevented this most happy consummation by keeping his distance so respectfully that he only enjoyed the sight of triangular bits of skirt as she whisked round corners. While she went steadily on, he would wait a while and then run a little, very warily. Nothing was to be gained by such dubiously civil proceedings. He lay in wait and fortuitously took the path in the reverse direction, with the result that they met face to face.

He did not understand her type. Her beauty fired him : he stared as long and as fatuously as her modest wooer Pian-piano, but he could not achieve understanding of the "sort" she was. Effrontery, he was lucky enough to divine, would not serve him, although a very sure weapon and largely employed in lady-killing. He did not care to assume the part of the suppliant, being accustomed in the pursuit of Beauty to carry things through with rather a high hand. Polite he judged he

must be, deferential, not in the least cringing. After five minutes of Zoë's company he realised that to treat her on a footing of equality, as a lady, was the right process. To his astonishmcnt, she responded in the same key. She was, he gaped to find, she *was* a lady. This was no make-believe, but the real thing. The discovery made him for a space mute as a fish, but lightened his soul considerably when the shock of it had passed. He had taken the road, word-perfect. The grand eloquence, tinged with familiarity that he had prepared, failed to come to his lips. Banalities were surer ground.

"I see you dance very often," he ventured.

"You know who I am then," said Zoë.

"Of course," he said, "you're famous, I assure you."

The oft-repeated compliments had a richer flavour from this person. Zoë allowed a smile.

"I don't know anything about you," she permitted herself, in English.

"By Jove! you talk English!" he cried.

"I am English," said Zoë.

Both of them felt this touching fact to be a bond. He reflected that she had a very strong Belgian accent, but that it was doosid jolly, all the same. She congratulated herself inwardly on her nationality.

"I am so glad," he said earnestly, "you are a compatriot to be proud of."

"I thought the same of you," said Miss Caxe, no less seriously, "when you helped poor Cassis and—on another occasion."

"I like to know you think well of me," said the

young man, gently sentimental. "I should love to gain your esteem."

Zoë met this decided advance with a silent flutter.

"You said you didn't know anything about me," he added, after a tender pause; and straightway fell to explaining his insignificant position in the machinery of the Embassy. Either his eloquence or Zoë's purple fancy, both probably, made it appear as great a post and as onerous as that of a Viceroy. She was greatly impressed. The fate of nations lay in the hands of this young man; to him foreign potentates bowed; kings' messengers traversed continents with his correspondence.

"A very great responsibility," she suggested politely.

He sighed mightily.

"Wearing beyond words! A fellow can hardly express. But there—it's a man's duty."

Zoë took a good look at him after this. He stood much taller than she, his long stride nearly doubled hers. Broad shoulders supported a bullet-head, not much neck intervening. The sole grace about the head was the flowing beard. It waved bushily about his face, swept his breast, floated behind his ears, dashed up into his eyes. A characterless brow and a good nose completed the features of this Esau. Zoë's eyes rested chiefly on the beard. She thought it beautiful.

I wish my hair curled like that, she meditated foolishly, and was that lovely colour. For his part, he admired her hair whole-heartedly, but did not desire to be bearded in that style.

They found a comfort in walking together, although

they were far from garrulous. They spoke of the weather and the landscape, but hardly a word more did these two solemn Britons exchange. They parted on the outskirts of the town: he off to his almost viceregal labours, she to her work in a whirl of ideas.

Many a walk had she taken with Campobossi; often had she trod the avenues in company with her manager; Joseph had been her squire; with Cassis she had strolled innumerable times, but never one of these excursions had given her ground for meditation. True, Amalia, Peggy, Martha, or Lalage had always made a third. Zoë was fain to ascribe the strangeness of the present case to the absence of this third. It was decidedly more pleasant to walk with one person: far more pleasant. A third is just one too many; you must turn your head one way or another to address your companion. Let us suppose you are the end one: to address your friend at the other side you must call across the central figure; that is obviously inconvenient. Besides, you may lose remarks made by the middle person, if he should turn his head to address your peer. The dual arrangement is infinitely more agreeable: a proverb has been coined with reference to it. Zoë realised the truth of it for the very first time. That portended something, surely; *there* was an omen. The psychologist should have somewhat to say about this sudden accession of intelligence: the romanticist has more: leaving the psychologist to burrow in the dust of theories, we take to the realm of facts. Zoë held commune serenely with her mind and its new intelligence. Her heart was coldly ignored. Trust a woman to deceive herself. We grosser creatures

are too candid with ourselves. We accept facts, we are appalled by our own feelings, and let passion sway us. Love leads us blindly on by the nose, smiling like fools our abandon and delight; the ladies sit at home and greet us calmly. We believe they know every word we try to say, but cruelly they prevent us. They are unkindest where they love. Dread thought—should they smile, we are undone; we rush, to be icily repulsed. They frown, or, more formidable still, they are unmoved; we creep daunted away. They triumph over us fallen until they choose that we shall return and rise. What man, knowing woman, can look his fellow in the eye and swear he has never been deceived? What idle prattler, boasting of his prowess among dames, can truly declare himself never to have been worsted? None: not one. Asseverations serve him not. We who have knelt before woman, have been ruthlessly, cunningly deceived—and mocked.

Three's none, thought Miss Caxe, *very true. In future, I shall always remember that.* Her next walk, the one after it and the subsequeut ones, testified to her excellent memory.

Chapter XV

goes a-wooing

DELIGHTS are said to be brief. Scarcely had Zoë returned to the pleasant afternoons at Claire's than the loving and anxious husband must think it behoved him to take his household to the sea. Zoë reluctantly admitted that the sojourn was necessary, urged them to go, and was sorry when they agreed to do so. The last visit came, the last embrace of the baby, the last bath, the last softly breathed blessing over the cot were all accomplished. She wiped a tear, glanced at the cloak, bestirred herself at sight of the time, and said good-bye.

Wychthwaite *was* waiting. Their greeting was sensible and cordial. She had expected him. The afternoon was disappointing ; it had opened sunnily, warmth hovering timidly above the frozen earth. Now a light mist rose vaguely above the fields ; the road, safer in the uncertain light, offered softened ruts, ankle-deep in places. She hesitated, stared at the suggested mud, and announced her intention of going across fields. They set their faces to the town and started away. Their shortest way lay far distant at most points from the road : a bridle path at its greatest width, narrowing to little over a foot wide in places. In the darkest night Zoë's delicate foot could have followed it ; she walked gaily on, straying not an inch from it. In

winter it was hard as iron, while the grass was crisply turfed; in wet weather the path was slimy and the herbage offered firmer walking. The gathering fog moistened it to a slight greasiness, but Zoë kept wisely to its narrow limit while the mist thickened.

Instinctive dread of man, the conqueror, oppressed her somewhat as they entered the first field. She glanced sidewise at this hirsute specimen of Joseph's deceitful sex. His full beard was silvered with beads of fog; the warm red of the hair shone through this patriarchal adornment. Drops of moisture impearled the ends of the moustache and were shaken off.

What lovely hair, thought Zoë. It's as soft as silk, I'm sure. *Copper set with pearls was* the result of further meditation; though here we scent the Muse. She drew a fraction of a step away from him, he followed as a matter of course: this skilful manœuvre was repeated several times, resulting in his having the path and her the herbage. He observed the change and insisted on her returning to the narrow way; she obeyed falteringly. His genial but not brilliant attempts at conversation were answered snappily.

If I am the least bit gentle, she thought with a mental shudder, who knows what may happen?

She therefore snubbed him brutally. Their vocal intercourse languished. Zoë marched primly along, full of alarm for her own safety; the supposed amorous man at her side, silent, and unemotional.

Occasionally they could hear wheels on the road that ran hard by, but later the path led farther from the highway and they were denied that sound. Their very senses were rendered useless by the encroaching

mist. A wall of white cloud encompassed them: sight was denied them: all noise was excluded; the bitter sharpness of the air served to paralyse their sense of smell: the moist earth and the guelder rose were alike passed unnoticed. Their eyes could not pierce the surrounding barrier, vainly Zoë fixed her gaze on the whiteness: it gave way as she approached, but revealed nothing. Now and again, some invisible hand drew aside the impenetrable veil to disclose for an instant the near view of monstrous tree or unexpected hedge: then dropped it silently.

A soft breeze stirred the fog, which surged in shades of greyness and whiteness to and fro before the undaunted travellers. Their breath fled in a white cloud to join it: Zoë's warm neck steamed, her wrists gave off faint vapour.

The pallid cloud receded always, yet ever followed. On the right hand and on the left, it kept its distance, above also, in every sense unapproachable. The solid earth alone kept its constant station. The thud of foot on the ground, where the path was still hard, echoed in muffled threefold cadence: on the slime of untrodden mud, the girl's light foot fell unheard. In spite of the mist, they went briskly on, Zoë setting the pace, silent for a while.

"However do you know your way?" he asked at last, while the white cloud drew nearer.

"I keep to the path," said Zoe, "listen." She stamped her foot on the trodden way, then on the grass: it needed no nicety of ear to distinguish between the sounds. "And if you can't hear," added she, stepping out again, "you can feel. At least, *I* can."

Wychthwaite tested this assertion as it applied to himself by treading a space on the path in her wake. He resumed his place at her side.

"Your foot is naturally a great deal more sensitive than most people's," he ventured. "I admit there's a difference, but not one that could lead me so surely as you seem to be going. I should need to make certain of each step."

"Dear me," said Miss. "You wouldn't get on very quickly."

"I'm afraid not."

So inoffensively did he follow like an obedient and unintelligent poodle that Zoë became instinctively less afraid. He was nothing but a kind and gentle companion. A brother could not be less disinterested.

The growing density of the fog caused the diminution of her modest dread. She felt glad of his company. He made no sign that he was glad of hers. This attitude of calm indifference, not without courtesy, satisfied her entirely. They trod their way in unexplained silence, he at her side, close, but not too close, just visibly dark in the white fluff of mist, his mighty brow hidden, mountain-like, by a wisp of cloud. Then followed certain mental processes, as below:—

The silence began to pall. Zoë wished he would speak that she might snub him. He offered no opening.

She wanted him to make some remark, not for the purpose of being snubbed, but to be nicely answered. He made no remark.

She would have liked him to talk about anything just to relieve the monotony. He said never a word.

She felt, with her lower lip advancing a little in a

sulky pout, that he was a laggard in wooing not to say something tender to her.

All of this within ten minutes. She waited, all in their progress without pause, for some word that should reveal his heart to her. None came.

Meanwhile the billowing fog clung to them. They walked no longer in the centre of a globe of space. Now the damp clouds brushed their faces and garments; the very ground was invisible, a hand held out before Zoë's smarting eyes was not seen.

She stopped, fearful of having strayed. In an instant, he had passed away from her. She called in dread for his return, knowing that by the field ran a brook, small indeed, but with slippery edge and several inches of glue-like mud beneath its waters. Her voice carried as far as the still striding giant: he returned, cautiously, a cry at each step. She shouted in return. Voices had a strangely choked sound: the wet air allowed of no gradations of tone: full clear sound was needed to pierce the curtain of mist. The vibrations of Wychthwaite's mellow cry seemed to come from every quarter: Zoë grew afraid of the prison wall that divided him from her; she halloed, shrilly: he seemed to draw away, still roaring a muffled diapason: her treble tone carried less far but more surely. He was silent to listen. She gave voice continually.

"I'm lost," she understood his next cry to mean.

"Here, here," she called, in frantic despair, and went in the direction of his voice. She fought against the horror out of all proportion to the cause that was overcoming her. His voice, fraught with bewilderment, went farther away; she wildly followed, her hand before

her. It touched some object, not human, a wall blocked her passage: she was at a loss. No wall had stood by the field she had thought to be in: the amazing discovery that she was truly lost made her dumb. Wychthwaite's bellow remained unanswered. She fingered the wall and put her face close to it: it was far from new, as she had fondly hoped: grey lichen broke off as her hand brushed it.

Her mind was busied with her next action; she had no idea where she stood. Wychthwaite's voice aroused her from her speculation: he was still out in the mist: she seemed to her own mind to have achieved some success in meeting with this wall. She took up her answering cry, standing by the wall; it served to throw her voice to him; at length he loomed exaggeratedly out of the fog.

"We *are* lost," she declared. He sighed with relief.

"Well, since we've found each other,'" he said, "I don't care so much."

They leaned on the wall, their arms touching. The wet cloud was no longer a prison to Zoë.

"Where are we?" he asked.

"I don't know at all," she said. "I got away from the path."

"And you don't know this wall?"

"Not in the least. I don't know of any wall along my way."

He felt above him with a great invisible hand: the top of the wall was just above his head. "I'll climb up and see what's on the other side," he said.

Zoë laughed merrily. "See?"

"I suppose not," he had to admit. "Aren't you cold, Miss Caxe?"

"Very," said Zoë.

"There ought to be some means of finding our way," he mused. "How did the fellows in Marryat's and Cooper's books find their way, I wonder?"

"By the sun, I believe," said Zoë.

"Have you a compass?" he went on.

"Unfortunately not."

"Moss always grows," he continued to murmur, "on the north side of a wall. This is moss, isn't it?"

"I call it lichen."

"Well it's that kind of thing."

"Oh, yes."

"Then this is the north side of the wall," he announced decisively.

"I don't see that that's much good, if we don't know where the wall stands," said Zoë.

"It stands east and west."

Zoë had nothing more to answer. She was exceedingly angry, with the weather for being so utterly vile and with him for talking such nonsense. She knew very well that the only thing she wanted to hear was not even remotely connected with the habitat of mosses and the geography of walls. Wychthwaite wisely held his peace. The whiteness departed from the mist which hung closer and thicker. A sombre tinge dyed it; it deepened, grew black. Zoë's anger gave place to resignation: every limb was icy cold: her joints ached; her eyes had tears wrung from them.

"We must move," he said at last, "if we don't want to be frozen."

They started away, hand in hand, he holding to the wall. Progress was slow and difficult; the ground was inches deep with mud: great sharp-edged stones hid in it; Zoe's thin shoes were ruined, the sides of her feet badly bruised. Wychtwaite lumbered slowly on, each foot, invisibly planted in the yielding mess, was drawn out with the *plup* of thick mud. Their steps were short and uncertain: they staggered and lurched, pulled this way and that, but dared not let go each other's hand.

Wychthwaite announced the end of the wall—a corner: they turned, followed that as painfully. Zoë was tired beyond expression; her sole comfort was in the grip of the great hand that enveloped all of hers. That little member was warm and glowing; at the realization of it, her heart glowed also. She would have loved him to draw her quite close and kiss her; the thought of such delight made her whole body warm. She moved her fingers in his hand; he answered with a firmer hold; Zoë pursed up her lips in the privacy of her fog-prison and made a silent kiss toward him. She wished the fog had lifted for the space of it, but the pall was inexorably steady.

Most cordially she despised her own height; had she been little, he might have carried her in his arms, close to his breast, her face on his shoulder, her arms about his neck: another glow of heat ran through her, to be succeeded by the physical cold that was wearing her out. Her head drooped sadly.

"No more wall," said Wychthwaite. They stopped. Another corner was exploited, and they pursued their way dully. Zoë trod on a stone that hurt the arch of her foot; she feared for her feet and let herself be

thrown away from Wychthwaite's side, rather than sustain any injury to her delicate members. She fell but was pulled up with a jerk: he retained her hand and putting his arm about her unseen body, drew her close to him. Zoë was all aflame. The world was shut out from them: they stood alone. She waited with starved lips, in the dusk, for a kiss. He released her and stepped on.

This weary journeying—how long it seemed to Zoë her cavalier could not know—brought them to a gate in the wall; after much fumbling, to a door. They knocked, were admitted, and Zoë was put by a smoking disagreeable fire. The man who had welcomed them was anxious to start for the town, where, he assured them, the fog would be less dense. Without *some* company he would not have started, it wasn't a night to be alone in. If the lady cared to ride in his cart, the gentleman must take a lantern with him and lead the horse.

Zoë made no sign of assent: with averted face, she sat close by the fire. Wychthwaite went out with the man to prepare the cart: Zoë was lifted in, and the two men disappeared before her in the darkness, the torches borne by them leaving a faint brownness in the surrounding black. They went off at a good walking pace, holding their unavailing torches high before them. The road was very bad, deep ruts, half-moistened, so that they did not break down, but offered grease to the travellers, ran along it. The wheels at length fell into one set, and the cavalcade went steadily forward. The slightest deviation from the middle of the road started the cart rattling thunderously: on each

occasion the patient horse managed to settle the wheels into the ruts again. Zoë could hear the men's voices rumbling forward. Their conversation, shouted round the horse's head, revealed the carter as a sheep-broker. His room, to which the wanderers had strayed, was his spring and summer abode, when farmers brought lambs and sheep of mutton age for him to sell. At times, he boasted at the top of his voice, he was fortunate enough to deal in valuable ewes and rams, whose destination was not the shambles. He detailed at a roar the different brokerages he received. His route into the town led past the canal and the slaughter-house, each indicated by insufferable odours to the passenger in the cart. The higher ground of the city escaped much of the fog. The horse's head showed itself, desolately nodding: Zoë could perceive her guides plodding in front. Houses loomed on either side. The procession stopped, Zoë scrambled out, opened her lips to give her charioteer a civil and grateful good-bye, and relapsed into muteness as she went off with Wychthwaite. At the corner of her road she bade him good evening also: he felt dismissed, shook hands calmly enough, hoped she would not suffer from her journeying and was gone. Zoë turned away, walked past her own door: she was too sore at heart to be alone. She went to Lalage's, working up a pretty anger on the way, surprising inoffensive burghers and tradesmen by stamping her foot viciously from time to time. She arrived quite gay at Lalage's room. The two made a Lucullian feast of apples toasted on bonnet-pins at thc stove.

The baby's health, character, looks, gurgles and

deliciousness were fully described and gushed over; Claire's pretty house, its position, architecture, furniture, hangings, windows, garden, conservatory and tennis court all pictured: her husband, servants, gowns, taste, talent and appetite all carefully sketched; the density, dampness, chill, blackness and extent of the fog narrated: the difficulties of journeying in such circumstances and the terrifying experience of losing one's way set forth.

But never a word of Wychthwaite.

"You must have some pluck, Zozo," Lalage said, "to go alone. I shouldn't dare. I'd have wanted Cassis,"

"Humph," said Zoë, "a man's no good when you're lost."

"I'd rather be lost with a man than alone, anyway," Lalage decided.

Zoë went home, her indignation against the offending swain very pleasantly restored by the fog, and seething within her. She slammed herself into her room and kicked her bonnet box as though that had got lost with her in the fog, or had been the cause of it.

A note was brought to her by Peggy. It had arrived some time before and an answer had been required. If a reply were to go now, Peggy, wholly sober, would take it. The writing was strong and black. She opened the envelope gingerly, her natural distrust of letters to the fore, Peggy staring, in unaccustomed abstention, with all her wits about her, saw the sulky look die out of her face.

"Zoë, Zoë, Zoë, I must tell you how I love you. I didn't dare to when we were alone lest you should think me a cad. I love you, I love you, I love you. Write to me."

That was its whole length. In the few lines, Zoë read her Paradise. She took her pen. What words surged in her heart were too sacred for her to write, only to him they might be said, only when love itself should be hers might she tell him what happy thoughts were in her heart that night.

"I am glad you wrote, glad," was all she sent by way of answer. Not angels rested more peacefully than she, nor when she woke were the blessed happier in the night watches.

Chapter XVI

eschews monotony

LOVE itself is such a business that all the world is set to helping in it, once it is started. If you will believe us, the whole of Brussels had been spring-cleaned in the night. The fog still held, but there was something particularly beautiful and mysterious about it, and the very clamminess of it had been transmuted by what we are not poets enough to call the Alchemy of Love, into a state as sweet as the sun's warmest kiss on the very loveliest day of May.

Zoë had scarcely finished her toilet, and read her letter of overnight seventeen times, when Madame Plisse brought her another note. It was in *his* hand, and, like the former, required an answer. Would she meet him! She laughed to think that he needed an answer for that: though, as she sat with her face in the paper he had sent, she realised that it would be very nice for him to hear from her this morning. But there were hours to overcome before she could reach *the* hour, and she started out to the tryst forty-five minutes too soon, thinking that if she delayed she might not live so long. In the damp, foggy Park she found a solace, for she loved walking, and the weather could never deter her. She found a solace and, of course, him. He had had no special fears about not living till the moment of seeing her, but he had found

the time inordinately long to spend at his work, and had come out in order to be able to think freely. He was well on in that exercise when she abruptly put a ban on all coherency by appearing out of the lessening fog. They had not known of each other's nearness, and they were both as guilty as if they had been caught at larceny. He was the franker, she the more at ease. Their hands met, and he found speech.

"How I was thinking of you!"

She put up her veil and showed a smiling face—she could not help the smile, but he was too blind to read in it the message that her heart had to give. "I was not expecting to meet you," she said.

"I was hoping," he stammered. He waited for her to admit the same thing, while she waited for him to tell her he knew she had been hoping. He lacked the courage and subtlety her love demanded, and she went, as did he, unsatisfied. At this point a Park-keeper loomed up, and Zoë reclaimed her hand, which she had left him, but with which he apparently did not know how to deal. When the man had passed, she expected him to take it again, but he only looked his desire, and they set out to walk side by side. Conversation was limited to his disjointed remarks and her timid answers.

"Only 'Yes,'" he burst out at length. "Is that an answer to a love-letter, Zoë?"

The question had troubled her since morning, and she was quite prepared for the remonstrance. "It is a very good answer," she had meant to say, and now, without any air of pre-arrangement, she murmured, "It is a very good answer, I think."

Certainly he was prepared for no such defence, and he rejoiced at the surprise. It brightened him into more strength. "If you will always say it!"

"You'd find that monotonous," she felt bound to reply, feeling a little unsure of herself as he gained courage.

"Wait till you hear what I ask," he said, and without any further palaver, lest he should lose his stronghold of coherent speech, he went on, "I have a string of questions to which you must say 'Yes.' It is the best answer, the best of all answers!"

"I must go home," she said after this advance.

"When you've answered, not before. Do you love me? Yes!" he broke off in the catechism he had promised her, to take the full sweetness out of this. She did not interrupt. They came to the Park gates. "Oh, Zoë, soon," he sighed, taking her little hand again.

The Place was noisy; they could hear chaffering, shouts, angry voices, uncouth laughter. She let her lover lead her back inside the gates for a moment. "Yes," she whispered.

How bold that made him! He stooped to her, releasing her hand that he might take all. Like a shred of the mist she escaped him, and he heard her laughing "No!" above the sound of the trafficking outside.

Chapter XVII

recounts, inter alia, the unnecessary gentlemanliness of a certain person, hereafter to be discredited for other reasons

IT is questionable whether it is well to be silent when Love is king of one's bosom. Zoë had long since made up her mind as to her course of action if ever she should fall in love. It was, never to breathe a word about it; whereas no sooner had the affair been broached than she ran full-tilt for Lalage, and out came everything.

Kisses, embraces, screams, tears, sighs, murmurs, nods, becks, and wreathed smiles were the accompaniment Lalage played to Zoë's sweetly told tale. Not the beloved himself could be more moved by the telling. Lalage was all tears and laughter, holding Zoë's hand, patting her cheek, stroking her hair, applauding, groaning, striking chords on her heartstrings, major or minor as the melody demanded. She insisted on hearing some passages again. That was very nice of her: Zoë was dying to retell them, to go over all of it once more. And joy of joys, Lalage was as indefatigable.

So out came the whole affair: what he had said first, how she had put him off; his answer, her retort; his sad look (O, so sad, Lalage !) her relenting; his boldness, her cool denial; his abasement, her graciousness; his humble advances, her dignified tenderness; his protestation, her implication of doubt; his horrified remonstrance, her polite interest; every atom of it, until

his Complete Establishment and her Entire Subjugation. Oh! the joy of retelling! Oh, the ecstasy of going over it again! Oh, the exalted frenzy of weaving into the story clever things you didn't think of at the time but wished you had! Oh, the perfect delight of inventing for him the answers he ought to have made if you had said the things you didn't think of saying until hours after! Oh, the radiant glory of crying at all the sad parts again until your eyes are nearly not pretty and your handkerchief a wet, wet ball!

All such pleasure man is denied. Love tenanting his bosom is a dumb thing: and uninventive for the matter of that. Wychthwaite told none of his clever sayings to any man.

Zoë shook herself to rights, gave a cheerful dab at her weepy eyes, a last tender hug to Lalage, and made to go.

"But, darling," said Lalage.

"Well, my Lalage?"

"You've forgotten——"

"Forgotten?"

"To say *who*."

"Who what?" inquired she *ex nubibus*.

"Who he is," urged she *in terra*.

Zoë laughed joyously in her cloud abode. "Why, you know, you goose."

"I don't," said Lalage, "but I can guess."

"Of course you can, silly."

"Pian-piano," Lalage suggested stoutly, hoping very much that she was wrong, and hoping greatly that she wasn't.

Zoë came out of the clouds with a thud. "Pian-

fiddlesticks!" she commented with a toss of the head. "It's Mr Wychthwaite."

Lalage's heart gave one great leap into her mouth; she gazed in mournful distrust at Zoë."

"Are you sure you love him?" she asked, wistfully, for the fifteenth time that afternoon, but the first with any meaning.

"With all my heart," Zoë said. Lalage turned her gaze away, asked no more qnestions, desired no more confidences. She saw Zoë out, watched her trip along the murky highway and disappear into the town without a word. Love's glamour, till lately candescent within her heart, had faded to extinction at the pronouncing of the name.

I hope he's good, she thought a hundred times. I expect he is. If he isn't, she's bound to make him so. I don't know anything against him. I hate him!

He's been awfully good to Cassis. I'll say that for him.

He turned those cads away that night that were after me. I'll say that for him.

He took no advantage of her in the fog, any man might have done. I'll say that for him.

He's behaved like a good honest fellow throughout. Gentleman's the English word. Yes, he's a *gentleman*, I'll say that for him.

But I hate him, hate the sight and sound of him. And I'll never believe she ought to love him——

Having come to which definite conclusion, Lalage decided to laud him as highly as possible to the damsel interested, preparing in advance some perfectly

nauseating encomiums of his personal looks, manner, character and so forth.

This dose she slyly administered in the course of her next interview. Alack! the poison was already so powerful that Zoë took the dose without turning a hair, and waited for more. Lalage provided it. Eulogy, adulation, flattery, and panegyric flowed from her lips with reference to the parhelion. Zoë was in the seventh heaven of delight. Far from being disgusted, she became more and more content as the recital went on. Lalage perceived it, astounded; she had miscalculated the reception Zoë would give such rhetoric. She stopped. Zoë sighed long and happily. Every dismal exaggeration had seemed to fall far short of the dear object's deserts; it had, however, gladdened her intensely to hear him so richly described.

She was to be married quite soon. The fiery lover would not hear of delay. Lalage learnt of the arrangement with a mixture of feelings; it reassured her, and yet she was dismayed.

"You don't know his family," she demurred feebly.

"I'm marrying him," Zoë retorted.

"Can he afford to keep you?" she asked, slyly.

"He keeps a carriage," Zoë proudly commented. "Of course he can afford."

Lalage pursued her questions with laudable zeal into every nook and cranny of her subject. Zoë's triumphant answers she met with a sniff.

"My guardian," Zoë remarked, "will see to all settlements."

Your guardian, thought Lalage. H'm. She forbore inquiry.

To this brand-new officer, Miss Caxe proceeded to send her ardent swain. She wished with all her loving heart to behave honestly towards her lover. All that was known of her should become his knowledge The lamentably ordinary origin she boasted met with approval for the first time; better, she held it, to go poor but honest to him than with a blot on her scutcheon. She assured him that they were not "engaged" until he knew all about her.

"After you do," she remarked primly, "you can come to me and ask me, if you still want to. If not, don't come." You may suppose all that he said in reply. Protest how he might, her scruples were not to be overcome. No embrace was to be his, no cheek should blush beneath his burning lips until he had obtained information. He wanted to start at the instant. They parted always on unequal terms, he declaring himself indissolubly bound to her, she claiming entire temporary freedom.

There was but little love making. He became sentimental. She checked the mood. When he walked home with her he asked in the quiet street to kiss her. She denied him the privilege firmly, believing that it wasn't *nice.* Verbal resistance served her, he went, unkissed, away.

"Have you ever," she asked indifferently of Lalage, "allowed Cassis to kiss you?"

"What do you think?" Lalage asked in return.

"I don't think its right," Zoë said, taking her literally, "to kiss a man before you're married to him."

Lalage vouchsafed no nswer save a blank and incredulous stare.

"I don't, really," said Zoë, firmly.

"Doesn't Thingemy kiss you?" inquired her astonished interlocutor.

"Of course not, Lalage."

"How on earth did you prevent——" the girl ventured to begin.

"Told him I wouldn't."

"And didn't he try?"

"Certainly not."

Lalage's inquest came to an abrupt end. She did not know how to take such astounding statements. Her expression of bewildered scorn did not escape Zoë, who read in it Lalage's contempt of such dull and respectable goings-on. She began to wish Wychthwaite were not quite so gentlemanly, but when he would have erred, she ordered him back.

"You must," her edict became, "go straightway to my guardian."

She wrote a letter to that great Panjandrum, and the lover went his ways.

Chapter XVIII

explains a girl's reasons

FOR she had, in spite of all the conditions she was now pleased to make, committed herself by that "Yes" in answer to his "Soon!" He had not failed to return to his catechism, when they met again, and all the perversity which made her interpolate a "No!" here and there could not recall that happy affirmative that had promised her to him. Whenever he cried out against this apostasy she was ready to tell him that she needed as much time as he did.

"But I need none!" he protested vainly.

"I will give you time," she replied. "I need it."

She set herself, when she could think sensibly, a severe self-examination, and professed to search the recesses of her heart and mind (as if, bless you! her mind entered into the matter at all). Reason and calculation had no place in her being during that period of supposed consideration. Her heart was the only member assailed, and the most rigorous inquisition therein had only served to confirm her in her resolve to act as impulse had at first bidden her. It was her first incursion into the garden of love, and she pretended to linger at the gate, asking herself why she loved him. Timid dove! her self-scrutiny led to nothing. She found refuge from all her own searching questions in her woman's "Because I do!" The thronging crowd

of her friends had all their little quota, but she was happy in not hearing their reasons. If they chose to arch eye-brows over the wonder of her accepting him, they spared her. "A position," the late Miss Tauzy thought, and Joseph was of her mind. Pian-piano conjectured that it must be for money—all the English are millionaires. Amalia had the grace to see the real answer written in Zoë's bright eyes. Lalage, who worried about it more than anyone, held it lamentable lack of judgment, but she was thoroughly put down by Cassis, whose opinion, the only favourable one among the men, was as follows: "The most noble gentleman in a nation of noble gentlemen." He was the only one, we say, among the men who liked him even slightly, but you don't presume to quote that to us, do you?

He was exceedingly handsome—every woman who saw him admitted that—some too readily. In face, in figure and mien, he was all that the most æsthetic critic could desire. Hyperion's curls—you know the rest, to say nothing of his beard. That of itself was enough to take the heart out of Zoë's bosom; you will remember how she described it to herself in the fog.

He was rich, as Pian-piano urged, wealthy if you will; not that such a fact would of itself weigh much in the love-balance of our girl; she had refused a competency with a husband attached before now; it is true that this was much more than a competency, so join it to the foregoing reason and carry on the addition.

His social position was of the highest, and he was, so it appeared, a gentleman. Zoë would have asked for nothing more, nor indeed would she have taken less. He was, furthermore, kind and considerate, and

on a certain displeasing occasion he had championed her cause very successfully—that he had only done so when he had recognised her, was unknown to any save himself—and on another, the misty one, he had behaved as only a true lover would.

She might have found all these reasons to quote to herself, if she had sought long enough. But she needed no reasons: her whole answer to all doubts was a sweet refrain of three words: "I love him, I love him, I love him!" Once said, it outweighed everything.

As for why he should marry her—since that question was not unasked by the captious — ah, come now, wouldn't we all have married her a thousand times over and blessed our stars for such high destiny?

Chapter XIX

reports an unseemly incident at the Fraternity, and the pusillanimity of the Brothers

THE little haven of meditation at her rooms was, Zoë was glad to find, unoccupied by Peggy. That attendant fay had been absent for thirty-six hours; prior to that, irregularities in her attendance had been noted. Non-appearance on one day was consistently followed by dulness of wit on her return: Zoë did not attribute it to illness, as Peggy fondly believed. Alcoholic excess was the cause of her defection, and every one knew it.

Persuasion did much to avert these crises, threats somewhat also, but Peggy's demon recurrently triumphed: less often, it is true, but not less thoroughly. After a bout of sixty hours, the dresser would rejoin her friends on the highlands of virtue, climbing by degrees from the sloughs of vice. She would make excuses in plenty; they were disregarded. Reasons she sometimes gave: they were received in silence. No reproach, no reproof met her when, orgies over, she came back to the reputable circle of her acquaintance. Reproof she might have withstood, but the coldness with which Zoë met her was nonplussing. It never lasted for more than two days: on the third, Peggy would be reinstated as dresser to her adored lady, and Zoë would be persuading her to seemlier ways.

A life-long habit is not easily conquered at the age

of fifty-five. Peggy struggled earnestly, trying to overcome her Apollyon. Delicious temptations in the ethereal form of alcoholic odours floating from hotel-bars and dingy taverns assailed her in every road, for, as you know, Brussels drinks on the public pavement. Exquisite airs, compounded of the choicest vintages, brews and spices, titillated her nose, as she passed the non-struggling, imbibing in mid-day the luscious beverages that exhaled that bouquet.

Great grievances were Peggy's. Her sole surviving relative has risen, if not to eminence, at least to respectable worth, in the practice of religion. Neither she nor he was aware that all of his prestige was due to the well-marked contrast between his undoubted piety and the feelings of the public figure of the drunken lady. He really thought his share of greatness was personal. Alas for ambition, even that of an humble friar. Brother Robert wore the white flower of a blameless life to the title of "drunken Peggy's brother."

It is the unfortunate lot of the veracious historian to present this lady in no favourable light. She possessed none of those charms by which you enslave us, mesdames. No bright eyes, no slender waist was hers. Her eyes rolled monotonously in her head, when potations triumphed; as to her waist nothing was definitely known; observing her dispassionately, you could not help wondering whether she were wider from side to side or from back to front.

Brother Robert, in spite of their near relationship did not love this lady. It was his only sin. He declared roundly that she was a disreputable creature

and had not been contradicted. He had acquired during his novitiate and training some vague gentility—not a very great amount, it is true, but he was not entirely unpolished. Of the gentler social attributes, tact and adaptability, his sister was unfortunately devoid, as we shall subsequently show.

No lady, *quâ* lady, would chose to have a seizure in the cloistered purity of a monastery. This was what Peggy did. She had come to ask Brother Robert for money, a demand she had made at intervals for five-and-twenty years, and with never varying result, unmitigated failure. Nevertheless Hope sprang eternal in her breast: and, with a perseverance which, considered in the abstract, was extremely laudable, she returned whenever she might to the charge. Brother Luke's vigilance was usually sufficient to keep her out, but on this occasion he was a victim to hay-fever.

He had muffled his active nose in a square of rasping blue cotton, his head retiring as far as possible into his tunic, and had opened the door without reserve In bundled the lady, basket, umbrella, odour of spirits, and all. Brother Luke, realising the heinousness of his offence, shot straightway into his own cell, and, not daring to think, had locked himself in. The triumphant entrant politely closed the door behind her, a duty that should have been Brother Luke's, and betook herself at her own sweet caprice along the vestibule to the cloisters. The paralysed porter, somewhat restored in wits, came out of his burrow and hurried after her. She met her saturnine brother: he scoffed at her plea for monetary aid, and expressed the brutal opinion that she was not sober.

"Who let her in?" asked Brother Robert, returning from gardening.

"Brother Luke, I suppose," said one of the Brothers, whom she had picked up like a comet and swept into her orbit on her passage through the cloisters. She raised her voice in cajolery. Several other Brothers, hearing the unaccustomed sound of that excellent thing in woman echoing through their celibate cloisters, gathered excitedly about.

"Let Brother Luke put her out, then," said Brother Robert, with an air of having once and for all done with her. She raised her voice still higher.

"'Tis a scandal," said Brother Job.

"It is indeed," agreed Brother Simon.

"It *will* be," prophesied Brother Jeremiah.

"Brother Luke ought to be ashamed of himself," said Brother Armageddon, with terrible severity.

"That he ought," acquiesced Brother Eutychus, but he smiled all the same.

It was just at this juncture that Brother Luke, snivelling and irritable, joined the group. They eyed him gravely.

"What do you mean," said Brother Robert, on a very high horse, "what *do* you mean by bringing women into the sanctity of our convent life? What do you think we will allow you next, Brother Luke? Hey?"

"Ah, what indeed?" said the Brothers, not rhetorically, but with a view to acquiring knowledge.

"Why, she's *your* sister," emphasised Brother Luke.

"Quite so," said Brother Robert. "I do not deny it. And if *I* had let her in, some excuse might be

made. A priest may have a *sister*, I presume, Brother Luke?"

A general murmur applauded this forcible argument. The lady smiled at Brother Luke as winningly as she could. Brother Eutychus and Brother Simon, between whom the unlucky porter had edged himself, drew away prudishly, taking good care that their greasy tunics should not brush his. Peggy beckoned and nodded.

"You said *you'd* give me money," she said coaxingly, and made as if to approach him. He found himself in the centre of a ring of condemning Brothers. She took his hand: Brother Luke groaned loudly and fled from her, breaking out of the ring and rushing along the cloisters, sniffing desperately, his blue handkerchief fluttering from him in his headlong flight.

The affronted lady became hysterical in a dreadfully calculating fashion, for while she mopped and mowed, screamed, banged with her fists, wept floods of tears, and behaved altogether like a distraught Banshee, one eye took note of the Brothers' attitude. This for the time was entirely stoical: she persevered, as in other matters she was wont to do, relying on two great forces, *vis et sæpe cadendum*. Brothers showed signs of embarrassment; they opened their mouths to say something and closed them again, the thought unspoken; they resembled moribund fish rather than would-be orators. Brother Eutychus stood among his fellows, his butcher-blue apron held bag-wise full of carrots; like a young Dis he stood, his apron making a bright touch of colour in the group. Peggy made a grab at him. Flat went Brother Eutychus, like his better-

known namesake; over went the lady, and the carrots rolled about them. Brother Robert picked up his Brother, but left his sister. This solitary representative of a gentler sex banged with her heels, screamed lustily, ground and gnashed her teeth. The door-bell rang. Venus imitated its tintinnabulation very creditably. It rang again. She repeated her performance in a louder tone. The bell rang once more.

"That coward daren't come out," said Brother Robert. "Decoys women into the sanctity of our—" the bell interrupted him very brusquely. "I'd better go," he said, and set out to find the coward, abstract the key, and admit the visitor.

The last was Mr Wychthwaite. Brother Robert took up his card to Brother Frederic, emblazoning it on the way with digitographs in grease, and left the gentleman meanwhile in a tiny stuffy room off the vestibule. From the sound of feminine grief, echoing shrilly throughout the cloistered seclusion of the monastery, the layman formed his own estimate of the Fraternal morals.

Chapter XX

contains a bad word

ZOË's ladylike script, together with Wychthwaite's card, was brought to Brother Frederic, where he dozed by the stove. He sat amazed before it. It revealed to him so much effrontery, Zoë's indubitably, that he was puzzled how to take it. Brother Robert, to whom Mother Nature had vouchsafed the treasure of indifference, stood by, waiting for an answer and listening to the faint reverberations of his sister's vocal efforts.

"I will see the gentleman," said Brother Frederic, at last. "I will see him here.

"Bring him round by the refectory and the back stairs and past the dormitory door——

"So that he doesn't see; you understand——

"I'll wait here.

"Her guardian! Well, I'm damned!"

Chapter XXI

takes us back into the realm of polite prose

THE itinerary, which Brother Frederic had shrewdly suggested for the avoidance of the cloisters, actually under gynæcocracy, took some time to travel. Wychthwaite avoided the Scylla of dubious convention to encounter the Charybdis of all the smells the monastery boasted. Some militant, some stuffily passive, that merely permitted inhalation, they hung about the back-stairs and refectory, not to mention the dormitory door, which allowed egress through its keyhole of some very antique atmosphere, and Wychthwaite met with them all.

To avert thought, Brother Frederic had spent the interval in trying to pronounce his visitor's name, bringing for that purpose every letter of it into play. The marvellous jumble of vocables with which he greeted Zoë's envoy, betrayed the fact that his study had been unavailing.

The interview was short, both gentlemen doing their utmost to curtail it. Proceedings were as follows:— Wychthwaite stated his own case, Brother Frederic stated what he thought might be Zoë's. Vivid invention is not confined to the laity. False representations were as thick as smoke. The collocutors then made the discovery that each held a brief for Zoë. Brother Frederic suggested a blessing, tactfully eliminating

much of the piety and inserting social phrase in place of it. In the aureole of this hinted benediction our lover came away, braving the clustered odours again. "O Zoë," he sighed aloud, when the air was clear enough for him to do so, "how I must love you, my little woman!"

Brother Frederic went down to the cloisters. Beauty was still prone, from stubborn defiance.

"This," roared Brother Frederic in his richest tone, "this is no gynæcium. Brothers! Eject this woman! Drive her forth! Out with her, out! What! Has my single virtue no power to exorcise this she-devil?" Peggy opened her eyes in mute reproach at the title.

"Begone, Baggage," he produced in diapason. The lady thus adjured sat up, fully prepared for verbal skirmish. Brother Frederic disdained to join battle: it may be that chivalry prevented him. He gave swift orders, recalling vividly, to the reader of history, the brilliance and action of Hannibal. Brothers hastened to obey; the group broke up, re-formed. Uncertain, coy, and hard to please, Peggy found herself raised a few inches, let brutally fall, still in a seated position, and with incredible swiftness propelled along the stone paving. A wooden tray had been placed under her and thongs slipped through the handles. Progress was hurried. Columns, glyphs, capitals, fan-tracery, ogives, mosaics fled past her in a charming pot-pourri of architecture and decoration. The street appeared cold and unsympathetic. A jolt, a bang, a whizz, a silence, and Brother Robert's sole female relative had been shot on to the pavement: the door

slammed and the monastery stood in impenetrable silence.

Peggy arose, spat thrice with mystic directness into the very wicket, and took her charms elsewhere, sobered.

She dressed Zoë that night, fully restored.

"Where have you been?" asked Zoë.

"Paying a ceremonial call, my dear."

"I'm leaving the theatre," was Zoë's next remark, dreamily given.

Peggy let her jaw fall to its fullest extent.

"I'm going to be married," was the further explanation. "Very soon."

"I'm to get a new place, then."

"Yes, Peggy."

Peggy's wits were sadly disturbed: she wisely held her peace. A pain of sickly tenacity had invaded her head, and suggested that spirits alcoholic were the authors of this astounding information. There are times when the border-line between reality and dream is very faint. Diaphanous memories mingled with the fiction of the disordered brain; fumes of past potations joined themselves to the faery fabric. In mental vistas, Zoë danced unsteadily to the altar with Brother Eutychus or Brother Robert, or herself performed religious rites with warders of the cells. Reason was not proof against such visionary assaults: all fact was dissolved in a vapour of imaginings.

Zoë returned modestly to the subject. "When I am married," "after my wedding," became in an hour or two constantly used qualificatives. Everything was to be performed prior to that ceremony or was rele-

gated to the days "after my honeymoon." The formula was monotonously familiar to Peggy ere long. Sobriety, intelligence, and realisation returned together. She caught the phrase on Zoë's lips a score of times. Preparing her lady's hair for the dance, she murmured aloud—

"Always will have things just so, men will. *I* know 'em, the brutes. Think women's wound up like clocks and oughtn't to go wrong."

Zoë dreamed, unpiqued.

"I don't believe these here sayings about marry in haste, repent in leisure. Repent *as* you marry's what I say, in haste.

"I've had husbands—buried 'em, thank 'eaven! Husbands ain't lovers: no one who knew'd make that mistake."

Zoë heard nothing of the peevish voice. Wychthwaite, god-like and all-glorious, filled her heart and mind.

She danced her nightly whirl, lived her days in fond dreams of him. He meantime was not idle. All was going apace towards the wedding.

Guests were bidden, a reception was arranged; the voyage they intended to make later was all planned. They were to go by easy degrees to Paris, then stroll sightseeing through Europe to Greece, where Wychthwaite had been assigned a post.

He had offered her a substantial sum to buy her trousseau; she declined it lovingly. Her salary, and a gift made up by her friends at the theatre, though infinitesimal to him, were together ample for her need. Supported by Amalia Campobossi and Martha, she

sallied forth to buy dainty garments. Behind the counters impassive men snipped at marvellous stuffs. The three pinched each others' hands in delicious agitation. Zoë stood for hours, being pinned, tucked, pleated. Bandboxes hovered about Madame Plisse's awkward doorway in continual succession.

At length all was ready, lace, linen, silk, velvet, cloth : things precious and things useful ; some to make Zoë lovelier by addition, and some to make her more beautiful by contrast. Every one sighed and wiped her eyes as she patted the dainty wardrobe into place. Every one had a lump in her throat when the girl, with blush and tremor, produced the dress and veil.

To-morrow became joy's date. Twenty-four long hours were forced to give way at last. It was to-day.

Chapter XXII

is occupied with a solemn rite

THERE was no lack of willing helpers to clothe and adorn the bride. Amalia fastened the dress; Lalage draped the veil; Martha read furtively and with the dimmest of eyes in the silver-bound prayer-book; Peggy buttoned the shoes and kissed each foot, blubbering noisily the while.

Below, a group of men waited, Campobossi curled and scented; the manager in a tall hat, white, if you please; Cassis, taking the day off, in all his best, lent ear to Madame Plisse's carnival of woe.

Never was such a cortège seen; Joseph, who had dressed the hair, not without emotion, ran all ways at once, arranging and organising. Now one of the women wept, but not seriously; now one of the men laughed, but not heartily. Bustle and confusion reigned.

The bride came down. She was tenderly placed in a carriage between her beloved Amalia and her dear, kind Martha, with her own sweet Lalage filling the seat opposite.

Campobossi groaned his hatred of Englishmen *sotto voce*. The others that rode with him agreed heartily in silence with his grumbles. "Beastly, hairy Raw-Beef-Eater" was Joseph's private estimate of the bridegroom.

The procession reached the church; foppish youths and old elegant men stood about in genteel groups; their fashionableness and their aloofness from participation in the service were in great contrast to our humbler and more devout party. Zoë's eyes recognised in them the pillars of Embassies, British and other; she was content to share the prestige of their appearance. A glance at her escort proved them to feel the honour of the company.

There were quiet tears and hidden smiles as Zoë became the property of the hirsute Englishman, by licence of Holy Church.

Among the prayers breathed by Lalage that Zoë might be happy rose one, more fervent by reason of its applicability, that she would not recognise in her bridegroom's best man their late pursuer on the Boulevard. It augured ill for the young wife's chances of happiness that that prayer was unanswered; Zoë had recognised, as Lalage had done, from the first. She refused to be distressed by the discovery, rejecting every doubt of the many that thronged to her mind. She even suffered the offender to press her hand in congratulation after the blessing; it was delicious to lean on Wychthwaite's arm, and face evil, knowing oneself protected.

The civil ceremony was sooner over and with less emotion. Lalage turned away from the couple after a quiet greeting; Peggy had no place among the gay guests; Lalage joined her as she went off. They paraded the streets side by side, silently for more than an hour, Peggy too sad to talk, Lalage thinking fearfully of only one thing. Heartsore with the weight

of her discovery, Lalage at last told Peggy all—beginning with the chase, and disclosing to her the fact that the chief friend at the wedding had been this very man. Dismayed at first, Peggy began at length to regard the matter more lightly.

"Boys will be boys," she said comfortingly, "and these here aren't more nor children yet. That very fellow's well your side of thirty, dearie."

Lalage shook her head.

"Besides, my Miss," the woman added, "they ain't got nothing to go with her now. She's got her man to look after her. Nothing like being married, there isn't. You'll see, he'll leave off going with such friends when she tells him."

No ray of comfort shone for Lalage. She found the circumstance black, and nothing could brighten it. She prayed long and devoutly when night fell, and slept at last for very weariness. Peggy in her loneliness wept herself to sleep. Her tears were inexpressibly bitter. She prayed also, but to Zoë. She had gone sober ever since the wedding had been announced: from this night, when she sealed a great resolve, she was never overcome by drink again.

The bridal pair, boisterously saluted by the elegant guests and the earnest guests, lunched and "received" at an expensive restaurant. Zoë was elated as she observed the respect with which her guests ate and drank of the luscious foods set out. The meal over, they drove away, sent off in a shower of rice, confetti, kisses, sobs, and messages.

"Be happy, my love!" cried Amalia.

"Be good to her," shouted the manager, waving his beautiful white pot-hat.

"Don't forget m-m-me," sobbed Martha.

"All happiness be thine," roared Joseph.

"Bless you, my child," intoned Campobossi. And Pian-piano, from a position behind every one else, bared his teeth, and said, "Damn that ginger-whiskered beast," loud enough for Campobossi to hear: he shook hands with him on the spot.

The carriage drove away, Mrs Wychthwaite at her husband's side. The day was clear and warm, the carriage went smoothly. Zoë's heart sang. She wished he would call her "my wife." Jewell-Brown, the best man, had said *Mrs Wychthwaite*, and Joseph had called her Madame, but here was an opportunity—that he did not take. Once or twice he rose to look from the window.

"What is it you hear?" asked Zoë.

"A horn, I thought," said he.

Surely enough Zoë heard it. She said so. Wychthwaite looked out again.

"What a lark!" he cried. "Old Jewell-Brown's tooling his drag out here after us. Wonder who else is there!"

"What do they want?" Zoe asked, without effusion.

"Oh, a regular joke, I expect," he said enthusiastically. "By George, they are a set!"

He enjoyed his meditations alone. Zoë sat in her corner without a word.

Chapter XXIII

reveals in what tragic wise Zoë and Brother Frederic passed a wakeful night, and how Wychthwaite slept

IT was a delicious night, vaguely misty and warm. Zoë leaned at the window, meditative. She could see the lights of the small windows disappear one by one; at length she was left with a single gleam. She watched it anxiously lest that also should be extinguished, and she left alone. Its glimmer, a mere speck on a fine night, hung nebulously circular in the moist air. She occupied herself with wondering what kept the villagers up so late. Well for the dainty bride that she did not know what tragedy was being illumined by that light. A man in his dying agony prayed behind the window, a priest and a doctor tended him. For days before all his family and friends had deserted him because of the nature of his malady. Save for the visits of priest and doctor, he had been alone.

The bridegroom tarried. Zoë's yellow head leaned on the jamb of her window, and her mind travelled speedily from the mysterious light to her own case. A clock struck twelve. Her sentimental mood, which she had carefully fostered all the day long, oozed away. Impatience succeeded, she became annoyed. A second clock struck the midnight hour tardily; she closed her ears to it. She looked around the room until she was heartily sick of the prospect,

and then returned to her watch in the window. She refrained from walking up and down the room, as her irritation moved her to do, from a desire to disturb no one else. Quietly opening her door, she became aware of music; the noise approached: a man's voice raised in song. Zoë closed the door again. The noise grew more distinct, the singer was coming upstairs. Only one voice but many footsteps were heard outside the room. Someone knocked; and she opened. A waiter, the boots of the hotel, and the proprietor were supporting Wychthwaite in the passage: his voice it was she had heard, but their footsteps, since he was in no condition to walk. The proprietor's wife held a candle to this scene; in her face Zoë read pity and kindness. The three men were grave. Behind the group the wall shone white and lustrous; a crucifix hung thereon, Wychthwaite lolled beneath it.

"Bring him in," Zoë said, throwing the door wide. The men lifted him again and half-dragged, half-carried his crumpled form into the room; they placed him on the bed; the boots unshod him deftly and held the shapely footgear under his arm. Zoë stood at the foot of the bed with the proprietress.

"Undo his collar," the woman said. Wychthwaite burst into song again as his neck was released; he held out his arms calling for his fairy Zozo. The waiter gravely fetched the sponge and a towel, slipped the one beneath his head and dabbed the other generously over the singer's face and neck. Wychthwaite, spluttering from the effects of the chill douche, attempted playfully to hug the man. He

was pushed back on the bed, and thereupon changed his tone, mouthing the vilest words Britain had produced up to that date. The Belgians understood him more than Zoë, in spite of their ignorance of the language. The words and locutions were new to her; they sounded unpleasant, but she submitted to them unhurt. The men very well knew what kind of thing the bridegroom was saying ; the waiter put the sponge in his mouth.

"Come with me," said the woman of the house, "Boots will watch."

Zoë looked pitifully at her ; the proprietress encircled her waist, trying to draw her away.

"No, I will watch," she said, "I am very much obliged to you." The men went out, after the waiter had rubbed Wychthwaite's head vigorously to prevent his catching cold, and left the door open. The woman tried to persuade Zoë, but the bride was firm. She kissed her gently, and indicated the bell-pull, hanging by the door.

"Just a touch of that, my dear," she said, "and I will be with you."

The sodden bridegroom lay on the outside of the bed, fully clothed except for his boots and collar. The icy bride stood at the foot, watching him dispassionately. When she turned away, she was distressingly agitated ; she returned to her station to look at him ; she was wholly disgusted : all other feeling was merged in the overwhelming sentiment of revulsion. His face was inflamed, the mouth working hideously ; his hair was ruffled by the waiter's attentions : he looked greasy and smelt vinous. All

the evil and vice in the man were released by his excess; he betrayed himself at every movement of his lips. He lay on his side, looking towards the door, ignorant of his wife's presence; he chanted a part of the marriage service with would-be comic intonation; swore idly, roused himself to be amorous, hiccoughed his love for his nimble-toed Zozo. Zoë watched him quietly until he slept. She had never seen anyone drunk like this; Peggy's orgies led to stupor, she never reviled or hiccoughed before Zoë. Brussels has never been noted for that kind of vice; its young men are not often intemperate to such an extent; it was a distinction of the younger members of the British colony that they drank harder (and were more frequently found intoxicated) than the despised Belgians.

Zoë realised that his gay friends must have followed them out and, after their evening meal and her retirement, joined him to celebrate the happy day. She decided devoutly that a far-seeing Providence must have directed him to the cup, that he might reveal himself in his true light to the waiting bride.

He was not a fair sight. She brought forth her crucifix from her bag and gazed on that, fell on her knees and earnestly prayed. Never had she felt so much the need of heavenly aid; she turned in her weary despair to her saints. Every word of her prayer was fraught with meaning; she poured out the bitterness and the loneliness of her heart, and comfort came to her on the wings of hope. She was respited for a while.

Bodily exhaustion overcame her; she dozed as she

knelt. Waking, she drew an armchair quietly before the window and a small chair at its foot, meaning in that temporary bed to spend what remained of the night. She pulled some of the bedclothes from beneath her sleeping consort; he was thrown violently over into the middle of his couch. The shock aroused him; he managed to struggle into a sitting position, supported by arms outstretched as flying buttresses; from this situation he exhorted Zoë, who had retired to the foot of the bed again, to help him up. The effort at coherent speech was too great for him, he succumbed to his weakness, and Zoë from her further refuge on her improvised couch heard him vomiting feebly. She wrapped herself in the blanket she had taken, opened the window and rested. Short dozes were broken by the fear of his presence or by the noise he made, snoring, swearing or weakly giving way to the effects of his potations. He could not see her; the solid wood of the bed-foot formed a complete screen. He threatened to come after her, apostrophising the door, by which he thought she had fled. More than once he made as if to get off the bed to search for her, but he had not the strength.

Zoë at every awakening looked towards the light that bore her sad company from the distant village. From that window also, Brother Frederic looked forth, wearied in flesh and spirit by his long vigil at the side of the moribund, and in his turn wondered who it might be that watched all night at Laeken. In the early hours of the new day, his charge died. The priest and doctor remained to prepare the body for burial; they performed their last duty to the dead

man whom none dared approach save themselves. There was no returning to the city before day; the doctor's trap was at the inn and the horse needed rest. The doctor settled to sleep. Brother Frederic prayed for the newly departed soul, and occasionally looked at the lighted window.

Chapter XXIV

shows Church, Medicine, and Stage all of one mind

THE first sign of morning in the sky set Zoë acting. She washed herself quietly in the fresh water that had stood before the window all night, and slipped into her dress. As she hooked it all the way down to her slender waist, she gazed her fill at Wychthwaite, rumpled and unclean in the centre of the bed. Still regarding him closely, she put on her bonnet and cloak, veiled herself thickly, and taking her bag in hand, went cautiously forth. No one was astir in the house ; the four assistants at her tragedy of the night had sat long to discuss her unhappy lot, and the proprietress had waked still later, listening for the bell ; as a consequence, everyone slept longer. Zoë could hear, as she passed the stables, men at work within : but she dared not ask for a carriage ; she wanted to get away unseen. Wychthwaite should ask in vain, when he set out to find her. No one should be able to tell him at Laeken, whither she had fled.

She trod the dark road without fear : vague lights appeared in the sky but none yet illuminated the path she followed. In convent days, she had often come this way on the feast of Mary, with wagon-loads of jocund girls. She knew the road to be long

and wearisome. She trod it briskly. She had walked for half an hour when she heard a light carriage coming behind her. Already the day had strengthened to a twilight. She could distinguish that it was a high cart with one horse and that it bore two men. She meant to hide until it passed, but the pale light showed her Brother Frederic's rotund form. She stepped forward and held up her hand; the doctor who was driving drew up, Zoë put back her veil and asked to be given a ride. Brother Frederic eyed her in astonishment; she was helped in and wedged between the stout physician and the stouter priest, who gathered his wits sufficiently to introduce the newcomer to his friend. The presentation made, they sat in silence, Zoë held her peace for a while, but she felt the need of advice. She looked at the doctor round the edge of her Leghorn bonnet, decided that he was good, and told her story without preamble. Neither man said a word: each was accustomed to recitals of every sort. Zoë spoke without tears, without indignation; the question that troubled her, and which her story led up to, was this:

"Need I go back to him?" When she arrived at it she hesitated. It was tremulously spoken.

Brother Frederic looked at the Cathedral standing beautiful and calm in the morning light above the city. "A religious marriage?" he queried.

"Yes," said Zoë.

"Then you ought to go back to him," said Brother Frederic. "The Church demands it."

"A civil marriage, too, you said?" suggested the Doctor, and *his* eye was fixed on the new Palace of Justice standing as solemn and glorious as the Cathedral over the town.

"Yes," said poor doubly-married Zoë.

"Then you *must* go back to him," declared the Doctor. "The Law commands it."

Silence followed these appalling verdicts. Zoë looked in turn at the Church and at the Law: the town was dominated by them. She felt her chain and it galled her.

"I won't," she flatly produced at last, so definitely that the Doctor, the Priest and the horse were all startled.

"That's right, my child," said Brother Frederic, involuntarily. "Don't *you*."

"You shan't," cried the Doctor at the same moment. The Cathedral and the Palace of Justice hid their affronted heads from them as they drove into the outskirts of the town. They went to the Fraternity. Brother Frederic clambered out.

"Get out," he commanded, "come in with me."

The Doctor was at a loss.

"There's nowhere else," the Brother urged. He'll search everywhere but the Monasteries, see if he doesn't. Out you jump."

Zoë pressed the Doctor's hands gratefully, lifted her veil again and showed her lovely pale face in an improvised aureole of Leghorn straw, and jumped down. Brother Frederic led her to his own office

and cell, gave her the key on the inside, brought her refreshment and went kindly away.

Thus for the second time in the course of this history, the walls of the Fraternity shelter a woman's tears.

Chapter XXV

depicts Lay and Clergy at variance

BRUSSELS was truly ransacked the next day. Wychthwaite and his companions of the carouse overnight, blades from the Embassy, sought in every quarter for the delinquent bride. They ventured within the severe portal of St Nytouche's; Wychthwaite sat on the very chair from which Madame Cari-Pède had once risen at Zoë's refusal to marry Bertrand.

Jewell-Brown, fluent of French, waxed grandiloquent to Sister Superior on the subject of a bride's duty. She acquiesced in his views, and was loud in her anger against the vanished lady. Kindness for the bereft husband shone in her eye, which glowed with indignation when she thought of the dreadful girl. Church and Law might lightly be defied, but Sister Superior never. She sent a polite note to Brother Frederic by one of the burly servant girls, requesting his instant presence to support and counsel her.

He left Zoë to the care of the whole Brotherhood, every man jack of whom concurred with him in shielding her.

He knew very well why he was sent for.

Sister Superior, Mr Jewell-Brown and the despondent husband gave him the story in shreds. Two of

his interlocutors, not the holy woman, showed every sign of having been participators in a recent orgie. The tale ran somewhat thus.

An eager passionate bridegroom had found, in the stead of his glowing bride, a dutiless and glacial woman. A night passed in vain obsecrations for a caress finished, for the weary and heart-broken groom, in sleep, whence he had awoken, to find that the wretched girl had fled.

"That bride," said Sister Superior, "that wicked bride, Brother Frederic, was the girl we knew of old as Zoë Caxe."

"You don't mean to say so," ejaculated our Priest, his gaze fixed on the sodden features of the brideless consort. "And she is now Mrs——?"

"Wychthwaite, sir," said that indignant gentleman.

"Aha," said Brother Frederic. "You are the gentleman, I believe, Mr ——. You must excuse me, but I fear, I very much fear, I cannot pronounce your name—who came to me with reference to Miss Caxe?"

"I did."

"And where," pursued the Jesuit, "where is the lady now?"

"That's the very thing we want to know," Sister Superior said.

Brother Frederic became encouraging: he begged to be told, most coaxingly assuring them that he wouldn't repeat it if they'd rather not, they really might trust him.

"I tell you we don't know," said Mr Jewell-Brown.

"She must be found," the Brother gave as his opinion, sententiously, "before you can compel her to live with you."

Only Sister Superior appreciated this opinion. Wychthwaite looked as black as ever.

"The Church demands her return," Brother Frederic declared, sonorously. "The Law commands it."

"Very apt," said Sister Superior.

"You have been married since——"

"Yesterday," said Wychthwaite.

"And (you must pardon me, but I wish sincerely to help the chief sufferer in this unhappy business) ——"

Wychthwaite bowed.

"And, why did she marry you? For money, no doubt."

"For love," stormed the husband.

"You amaze me," said the Brother. "Tut, tut! Why should she wish to escape your natural caresses, your devotion, if she married you for love? I apprehended that the exhibition of such marks of affection (accordant concomitants of the marriage state) was commendable and expected, when mutual attachment of parties was the case."

"*Did* you?" commented Wychthwaite in his native tongue.

"Very right," said Sister Superior.

"What is a man to do?" asked Jewell-Brown.

"Find the lady," said Brother Frederic.

"Where?" asked Sister Superior, rhetorically it

would appear, as no one so far as she knew was possessed of the answer.

"How?" more pertinently asked Mr Jewell-Brown.

"Find the lady and make her explain herself," said the Brother. "I am a celibate, I know nothing about such things——"

"Very correct," murmured Sister Superior.

"But I know, sir," continued the Brother, with increasing severity, "that had I a sister, or did I know of any decent girl who fled from her husband in a love-marriage on the second day of her wedded life, I should suspect some other reason than any the loving bridegroom would choose to give."

The loving bridegroom exhorted looked puzzled.

"If I doubted her mor——" he began.

"If you doubted," shouted the infuriated cleric. "You dare! You dare to doubt! Doubt, I say! Ha!" And he accompanied this outburst with so menacing a gesture that his listeners shrank back.

"Neither you nor any person shall criticise that unfortunate lady in my hearing," the Brother went on. "Her education, which was effected in this very asylum and in the unremitting care of this saintly woman and her able assistants, has better fitted Miss Caxe to resist the temptations of a secular life——"

"Very true," said Sister Superior.

"Than have," thundered the Brother, "than have the continual debauchery and intemperance with which you, sir, have been indulged! You are a drunkard, sir! You are natural son to the Father

of Lies, sir, and you are come into your patrimony, sir! You are a very Dæmon, sir! Last night you went to your waiting bride in the care of three men. You passed that sacred night in lewd song and swinish sleep! Leave this convent! Out with you from these chaste walls! Dare no longer to pollute the air of this vestal edifice!"

Mr Jewell-Brown stood firm; Wychthwaite opened the door.

"You wretched old turkey-gobbler," he said to Brother Frederic—that was the very term he used—"Where is my wife?"

"Where no one who casts aspersions on her shall intrude," said Brother Frederic, panting after his burst of impassioned oratory.

Sister Superior indicated the door. "Go out," she frowned, "unless you want my Sisters to throw you out."

With no more formal leave-taking than this, they went forth; and Sister Superior sent up a prayer of thankfulness for her delivery from them, as though the Arch-Fiend had for the nonce multiplied himself by two for the purpose of doubly assailing her.

Brother Frederic mopped his head and seated himself. "I will, if I may, rest a little, my Sister," he remarked.

"Where is she?" Sister Superior coldly inquired.

"Where no one who casts aspersions on her shall intrude," the Brother answered blandly. "Away from those ruffians."

The ruffians meanwhile stopped the first priest they

met: one from the very seminary which hated Brother Frederic so candidly. This obliging person, on hearing a description of the good man's attire, gave careful directions as to the position of the Fraternity, even going to the corner of the road to point the way. Thither straightway went bridegroom and best man.

Brother Eutychus had taken a delicious tit-bit of bread-and-jam and coffee to Zoë's cell, and was strolling easily kitchen-ward, having attained the entrance hall, when the terrific onslaught on the door greeted him. He hastened to the wicket before the astonished Brother Luke could summon enough courage to issue from his office with the key, and opening it, reconnoitred the wrathful pair of gentlemen. He guessed who they were in a twinkling, and lucky it was for the girl within that he and not Brother Luke had the colloguing with them.

"Not to-day, thank you," said Brother Eutychus genially, and snapped-to the wicket.

Wychthwaite thundered once more upon the knocker and tore at the bell. Brother Luke stood quavering within the office, his nose aflame, his rheumy eyes dripping tears of agitation. Brother Eutychus looked out again.

"Why couldn't you have come an instant earlier," he inquired, "when someone else knocked?"

"Where is Mrs Wychthwaite?" said her spouse.

Brother Eutychus may reasonably be excused for not understanding the question. He had seen Zoë's new name written, but never imagined

it sounded as its male representative roared it from the pavement.

"If you please?" he gently said.

"Where is Zoë? Bring the lady out," shouted Wychthwaite.

"Bless me, the gentleman takes me for a nun!" said Brother Eutychus, coyly. "This isn't a nunnery, my good sir. I blush to avow it, but I am a Brother."

Jewell-Brown took up the quest, less furiously. "We want to know, don't you know, if there's a lady here, eh?" said he, as gently as he might.

"Dear, dear!" said Brother Eutychus, trying to blush through the twelve-inch square grating. "You must be a Protestant, sir."

Mr Jewell-Brown gave him smile for smile: the Brother's was the more genial. "May we come in?" he suggested politely. "It will be easier to explain our meaning."

"Most certainly," said Brother Eutychus. "I'll find the porter and the key, the Brother who's got charge of the key, you know. I shan't keep you long." He closed the wicket again and led Brother Luke by the hand to the side door which opened on to another street.

"Oblige me, my dear Brother," he urged him, "by stopping out until these gentlemen grow tired of waiting." Brother Luke trotted blithely off and regaled himself on eggs and small crabs at the nearest public-house. Brother Eutychus ambled back to the main door.

"I am *so* sorry," he announced through the grating, "but the Brother who keeps the key is out. We're locked in."

"We'll wait," said the two laymen.

"By all means," said the Brother. "Sit on the step, won't you? There's not much mud."

They preferred to stand. Every few minutes Brother Eutychus politely brought a fresh face to the wicket. All assured them that the Porter would return some time, expressed regret and begged the gentlemen to be seated; there wasn't much mud. Brother Frederic appeared.

"Here's one of your chaps," said Mr Jewell-Brown.

"No doubt the porter," said Brother Eutychus, who could not look up the street, but hoping devoutly it wasn't.

It was impossible for Brother Frederic to get in as the Brother who had charge of the key—and so on, and so forth. Conventual life had made the Brother patient; *he* did not disdain to sit on the step. He had met Brother Luke at the corner; the Porter had run out, with his mouth full of soft crab and hard egg, as his confrère passed, to explain matters.

Wychthwaite's patience being mortal, at last gave up the ghost. Mr Jewell-Brown's was long since defunct. They went off without a word in answer to all the civilities they had received.

In a very low public-house on their route they saw one of the brown-tuniced Brothers, eating shell-fish and dirtily scattering the débris thereof on the public road. Too late they guessed that he must be the one

with the key. They returned at full speed to find the door as soundly barred as ever, but Brother Frederic on the Zoë side of it.

No amount of knocking brought a jocund face to the wicket.

Chapter XXVI

sets forth deeds of derring-do

WYCHTHWAITE was in a parlous plight. The Church had diddled him, as Mr Jewell-Brown expressed it, the Law had failed him. Its oracle, paid at the rate of six-and-eightpence, had delivered the self-same sibylline message as Brother Frederic had done gratis : *You must find the lady before you can compel her to live with you.*

The Fraternity had been explored, from cell to cellar. Brother Simon had seen his dirty linen basket rudely turned out, every thing pell-mell on the floor : Brother Eutychus had watched strange hands rummage among his pots and pans, and leeks and parsnips. The Brothers had enjoyed the fun : they were embarrassingly willing to help, opening doors that had scantly disguised smells, to let those nostril-tempting vapours abroad in the faces of the searchers. They had dragged the corps up and down the stairs on false pretences to search a cupboard or to burrow in a garret until, weary and snappy, Wychthwaite drew his posse off. There was no sign of Zoë in the monastery. She had slept in complete safety at her old room at Madame Plisse's, which had been searched earlier in the day. The second day passed in seclusion at Peggy's room. Zoë counted her shillings, the sum did not run to pounds ; felt her need of money

acutely; all her savings had gone on buying her trousseau. It was clear that she could not longer lie in hiding without working for her livelihood.

A message was brought warily to her from the Brothers that Wychthwaite and his band were going immediately out to the Brothers' country seat, some few miles from the town. Zoë read the note, thought, and speedily acted. She sent word to the theatre that she would dance if they would have her.

If they would! was the manager's answer. Peggy, who had borne the message, explained it. She alone, beside the Brothers and Sister Superior, knew the whole story. Everyone else believed Mrs Wychthwaite to be enjoying the bliss of honeymoon *en route* to Paris.

Zoë followed the message very warily, and came to terms with her manager. Money, she declared, she must have. He scented advertisement in the notoriety that must ensue, and offered her a larger sum than she had received before. She accepted it thankfully, understanding the reason of the increase and not objecting to it.

"Show him you don't care a—bit, Miss Zoë," said the manager.

"I will," said she firmly. She felt that she did not care a—bit: all the anguish had been passed in those night hours, or while she knelt torn with sobs before the crucifix in Brother Frederic's cell. Public opinion, she believed, would be with her; the town was usually just, and open also, in such matters. She had as little doubt as to private opinion. Dread of Wychthwaite alone hindered her from visiting, explanatorily, all her friends.

She slid into her yellow tights and decked her yellow hair, very contentedly, in her stuffy little room at the theatre, waiting for Amalia to arrive and to be told of her return. Continually she insisted to Peggy on two things.

First, if any man comes for me put him in the manager's room and lock the door before you fetch me. I'll reconnoitre through the hole Miss Tauzy kicked.

Second, if anyone offers you money, never mind how much, to tell him where I am, take it—("I will," said Peggy, fervently)—and tell a lie.

The charge pleased Peggy. Zoë drummed it well in, was twitched to rights and went on. Great cheers arose from the house; for nearly a week she had been absent. She felt her prestige returning.

The theatre, its look, its misty sea of faces, its odour, its sounds, acted as a tonic for her. She nodded cheerily to the orchestra, bowed to the smirking Pian-piano and gave her dance. She had a grand round of applause. In the wings, the manager clapped softly. The tenor, the contortionist, the funny man, the lady-conjuror, all gathered to greet and congratulate her. They had heard of the unhappy business; curious regards mingled with cheerful smiles. No Amalia was there. Zoë did not choose to wait; she returned cautiously on Peggy's arm to that good creature's room; the door fastened, they both snapped fingers at the absent husband.

News of her egregious daring met Wychthwaite on his return. He was thunderstruck, feeling the situation hopeless. There was something abominably

decisive about his wife, illustrated neatly by this behaviour, that gave him pause, and food for thought to occupy it. He reiterated with sober lips the lewd and blasphemous phrases he had used three nights previously when intoxicated. His helpers laughed; they admired Zoë.

Chapter XXVII

is occupied with stratagems

IN consigning the culpable husband of his god-child to fry in flames, Brother Frederic had fondly hoped to have done with him. The verbal battle over, victory on his own side had given him ground for belief that the gentleman was once and for ever settled. To make the matter doubly sure, the Brother had carried it to a higher tribunal and, with a firm trust of his own influence in that quarter, had handed the case of Wychthwaite, earmarked for everlasting condemnation, to be confirmed by the superior power. If fryings, in pursuance of his urgent recommendation, were to be, their hour was not yet; until the infernal grillers should receive the blackened soul of the sinner for ordeal by fire, the corporeal wrong-doer went his way unperturbed.

Yet it was evident, even to the celibate understanding of Brother Frederic, that Wychthwaite could not entirely be at peace. A glance at Zoë illustrated very vividly his enormous loss; the lover whom Beauty rejects is everywhere commiserated; what, then, of the husband who is sent about his business, or, to be accurate, about business that isn't by any means his, his own being absolutely denied him? When this aspect of existing circumstances was borne in upon the mind of Brother Frederic, he realised with placid astonishment that all reprisals are not left for the

hereafter. The fact had never so strongly appealed to him as when he looked at Zoë and remembered Wychthwaite.

That suffering etherealises is an axiom very generally accepted by the sentimental: its popularity lies with people who read moral tales and skimp household expenses. Zoë's cheek was no paler, her look no gentler; but to those who knew of her adventure, regarding her with a graver attention than they had vouchsafed her before, she truly seemed to have gained in beauty. The glamour of grief and experience of evil was about her; the widening circle that heard her tale wondered, pitied, and admired. Independence of spirit is often highly applauded by the disinterested; when a dainty woman, looming in the public eye, displays it, the admiration is very great; when, furthermore, its exhibition leads to the comic discomfiture of an abhorred ginger-whiskered raw-beef-eater, the hilarity and approval are unbounded.

That particular quality was the very one that Brother Frederic least sanctioned in his pupil; he implied reproof. Zoë listened with weary deference.

"I am sorry to incur any such charge," she said. "I will strive to be humbler, more docile—I will indeed."

"May you be strengthened in your resolve, my child," said Brother Frederic. "You shall have my special prayers."

"Thank you, my Brother," answered Zoë. "And the next time I marry, I'll be a most dutiful wife."

"The what?" cried the Brother.

"The?" Zoe repeated.

"The next time you—oh, my goodness!"

"I was only joking," Zoë said.

Brother Frederic stared at her angrily until coherence became his. In his opinion the jest was infinitely worse than the serious idea. With lamentable lack of finesse, the poor dear old gentleman tried the effect of bullying. Here was her salvation; she had an excuse to weep. He could not understand how tired Zoë was of the subject, every point of which had been considered and reconsidered and examined again and had returned for investigation until the mention of it was torment.

She had gone in her trouble to Lalage, taking devious ways and paths, expecting comfort from her. That astonishing creature immediately mounted a pedestal of unassailable virtue, whence she descanted at full length of duties, scandals, ill-advised actions, marryings in haste, etcetera, and ended with an "I told you so!" so solemnly enounced, that Zoë, greatly discomfited, had at once fled. Lalage waited not to hear the door shut to get down from her pinnacle of high thoughts and weep heartily. Much of her lachrymose out-pouring was joyful. She rejoiced over the Humpty-dumpty state to which the erstwhile paragon, Wychthwaite, was reduced.

Zoë approached Amalia Campobossi less certainly. She had learnt that the woman had been in the wings on the previous evening, but had not "chosen" to see her. That fact had startled Zoë. Tremulously she called upon her. Amalia did not, it is true, mount

an inaccessible peak of virtue, but from her position on the plain of mediocrity, she harangued Zoë as eloquently as Lalage had done. Duty was her text, and she arrived at tenthly before matter gave out. Zoë had a mite of comfort in the knowledge that Campobossi was on her side, from the way in which he had been bundled from the room on her arrival, and the hearty grip he managed to dart forth and bestow on her hand as she descended the stairs in disorder.

Martha failed her also. The good creature sighed, doubted, looked askance, hazarded moral remarks, became unwittingly plagiarist of the two former sermonisers; Zoë met her reproaches with grave and wistful look. A tear shone in her eye: Martha saw it and was undone. Sobs, embraces, sympathy were her resort, her sweet good nature was stronger than her restraint; she kissed Zoë and would have kissed her as a bigamist or worse.

"Whatever you've done, my d-darling," she said, dabbing her own eyes and Zoë's alternately, "is for the best, I don't care what anybody says. They can say what they like."

"Who has said anything?" Zoë asked.

"No one, dear child."

"Joseph?"

"Don't cry any more now, my dear."

"I'm not crying any more. What has that old Joseph said?"

"That old——oh!"

"Well, Joseph."

"He only said if you were *his* wife, he'd see you

——farther, before he'd let you run off," Martha produced hesitatingly.

"He didn't say farther," Zoë objected, "Joseph would see it was the very word not to use there."

"No, he didn't say farther," admitted Martha, but without supplying the word he *had* used.

Zoë shook her head and meditated. Her next journey took her home, completely disheartened. She swore within herself to seek condolence and sympathy among her feminine friends no more. She danced at the theatre, avoided by Amalia and avoiding her. After a few days, the noble and virtuous elocutionists came round. They had been greatly disappointed to find that she had not returned for further exhortation. Joseph himself succumbed; he had escaped the rigorous care of the late Miss Tauzy, now become his Lares and Penates, on the feeble pretext of going to see a man about a dog. To the theatre he went, most stealthily, watched his friend dance and went behind the scenes. He confessed to his wild potential threat, turning it very neatly into a compliment. He was pleased to be charged with it, even the dreadful word he had used instead of *farther*. The compliment had force.

Campobossi revealed himself Zoë's slave in perpetuity. Old hatred of things English found a concrete object in Wychthwaite; the Italian did not express it before Zoë, but his wife suffered vicariously. Oaths and dreadful menaces were her regale for days. She truly feared for Wychthwaite should her fire-ating comrade meet him in single combat while the mood lasted. Fortunately for the lonely husband, he

did not come into contact with this anglophobian Latin.

It was not to be expected that one failure should deter that deserted man; two did not; a third, a fourth still left him militant to regain his own. He did not intend to sit quietly down under the opprobrium of his loss.

Efforts were made in every direction to get possession of the lady. She was shadowed, followed by truculent-looking persons, once waited for by the determined husband at the theatre door, on which occasion she slept in her little dressing-room with Peggy and breakfasted in the royal box; but she went strongly protected. Not always might she return to her room at Madame Plisse's, where night after night and day after day the husband and his band of sparks watched and waited. Sometimes Lalage's roomy garret welcomed her, and the next day she would appear in broad daylight on the Boulevard tripping sedately homeward. No effort was successful in discovering where she was at the moment; it appeared that no mortal hand could close on her. After a night spent with Lalage, she would elude the posse and run off the following evening to the Campobossis'.

A game organised for children could not have been merrier than this was for a while; there was a thrill to be experienced every time Zoë, on the arm of some stalwart friend, went out; corners to be reconnoitred, streets to be hurried through, passages and arcades to be avoided. Dartings into shops became an exercise of hourly occurrence: hurried clamberings into carriages

with a scream of "Drive on quickly"; disguises were assumed, varying from Peggy's strange costume, an aged riding coat, faded and buttonless, to the fashionable ulster that the manager affected. Adorned by no less than four different hats did Zoë journey to and fro in one day, returning finally homeward in a pseudo-nautical cap with cloth curtain at the back and a patent leather strap to button beneath the chin, borrowed from Campobossi, whose taste in dress was as catholic as any man's.

Such subterfuges, however amusing, became intensely wearying. Zoë tired of them before any one else. She began to fear her fate. Wychthwaite could not, would not always so easily be put off. Already, writs, ominously bearing royal arms, began to arrive. Left to herself, she would have gone without a murmur whither these formidable documents ordered, but fortunately for her peace of mind, her male acquaintance forbade it; they actually mocked at the seals, made fun of the bearers and threatened to "do for" a pale youth who ventured into the theatre, armed with such a document. Zoë was enheartened, and when told to burn the beastly things, did so, tremulously but surely. Policemen alarmed her, she saw in each sleepy one the arriving justice, ready to clap her into the nearest dungeon, there to pine in gyves. As for the town-crier, the unexpected sight of that dignitary, roaring the loss of a dog, set her quaking for an hour.

The Law, once invoked, set itself in motion, and having majestically commanded Zoë to return to her husband (and been disregarded) came to a halt.

Wychthwaite found no support in sonorous phrases quoted for his better information. His Embassy, scenting scandal, was officially cold and would take no steps. Its members, one set of them, lent all assistance privately, having an interest in matrimonial difficulties and a penchant for abductions. The older men shook their heads doubtfully, admiring Zoë's spirit. The younger ones planned furiously together, intending to bear the lady off by brute force, and engineering many a fiasco. They lay in wait, missed her once, twice, always: one of them saw her whisk into a carriage; another, just too late, recognised the wealth of hair; a third found himself alone when she appeared on Peggy's strong right arm.

The story had early become public property. Everyone knew Zoë, the theatre was nightly thronged. An apt illustration of her complaint against Wychthwaite was afforded by the arrest of him temporarily for drunkenness in the road before his hotel. It was explained in extenuation that he had meant to mount from the smoking-room to his apartment, but had wandered by mistake through the wrong door, and down the steps instead of up the stairs. The excuse saved him from imprisonment and fine, but served to weaken his cause and strengthen that of his wife enormously.

At the theatre, at home, out of doors, Zoë became aware of an infallible guard about her; every man's hand was for her; Wychthwaite was her solitary enemy. On one occasion she had gone with Lalage to a dentist's. The man was a stranger to both. As they made their way down the stairs, they were

recalled; the dentist, looking from his upper window, had seen Wychthwaite across the road idling from shop to shop, his eye on the small door that admitted to the dentist's apartment. Zoë and Lalage were sped by another door by their new protector, who seemed as anxious to save her as if he were Campobossi himself. The incident showed Zoë how safe she was. Brussels was her safety. A vague idea she had cherished of leaving the city was at once and for ever dismissed.

The husband was weary of his waiting; he and his army concocted a manœuvre to carry Zoë off. The affair was whispered somehow to the people of the theatre. The adherents of both sides were in full force during the performance. At its close, twenty stalwart fellows ran out with a sedan-chair, a "property" but a solid piece of work, and made for Zoë's lodging with it. A plaid cloak draped the lady; a well-known garment it was, of modish cut and bright colour, familiar to many an eye.

Fifty swashbucklers rushed the small corps and overcame the heroes, carrying off the lady. The whole of Brussels came running to see the sight, unusual in their streets, of skirmishing armies with no view to slaughter. Feminine shrieks from the chair and masculine roars from both factions, combined with the surging and fighting, gave an air of an eighteenth-century abduction. The chair was pulled and pushed, carried and dropped, bumped and jolted. Now it was with Zoë's party, now enemies bore it in triumph. An hour passed before the yelling company arrived, bruised and dishevelled, at the door of Wych-

thwaite's hotel. His followers ran in triumphantly with their burden. A thin voice screamed and squealed; Zoë's band surged after this new Ark of the Covenant; the vestibule, offices, steps, and front of the hotel were densely packed. Wychthwaite roared joyfully, and to celebrate his victory drew a miniature flag from his pocket and waved it triumphantly. Out from the chair, around which a space was left, tripped Campobossi, Zoë's elegant cloak held about him. To the music of human laughter he approached Wychthwaite and courtesied mincingly, thanked him for the ride, and begged to be carried further to his apartment in a street hard by. Cries of "Shame!" arose when Wychthwaite retired angrily before Campobossi's proffered embrace. The fat Italian acted the rôle of a wistful lady and extemporised a little play, in which the angry husband was most fitly and unwillingly played by Wychthwaite himself. The performance lasted until Wychthwaite made a bolt for his own rooms, and left the side-splitting crowd to roar his discomfiture after him.

No one could help laughing; the husband's own adherents were rejoiced. Campobossi was lavishly treated to drinks of the best on the pavement, and carried as he had requested to his own lodging. He arrived in state, still squealing in an admirable falsetto, at his wife's rooms, from the windows of which Amalia and Zoë laughed to see the cortege approaching. The damsel meanwhile had tripped on foot to the Campobossi's house, quite unmolested, and had enjoyed the sight of Campobossi's magnificent return.

The town was too hot for Wychthwaite. Unpronounceable, he was generally called "that ginger-whiskered raw-beef-eater." Small urchins did not scruple to bawl the title at him in the streets. Shopmen ran out from behind counters to point him out to their customers; boys driving carts nearly fell off their seats with laughter at his approach. Zoë learnt in a few days that he had left Brussels.

Chapter XXVIII

in which Hope sinks awhile

CLAIRE had come to Brussels before Wychthwaite had left the town. No rumour of the extraordinary story had reached her from afar, but she had not been in the town an hour before she knew every detail of it. Before a day had passed, she had investigated it. Her brother was conveniently placed at court; ambassadors and their acolytes were his daily visitors. Not a breath of scandal could exist about any member of the Embassies, however insignificant, without his knowledge. He primed his anxious sister thoroughly in the matter of Wychthwaite. Claire asked all and was told a good deal. She learnt that Wychthwaite and his circle were acknowledged the cads of the whole service.

"Knaves *and* fools," said Burmance, "they're no use in the Service, and I don't see that they're much of an ornament to Society. That kind of ass always ends by marrying a ballet-girl."

"The girl in question is my very good friend," his sister advised him.

"Your friend? Yours?" he cried, with amazement.

"We were at school together. She's also my dearest friend now. Baby's godmama, too," the lady said. "Please believe nothing wrong about my Zoë."

"Is *she* your Zoë? The Zoë of the boards?" the young man asked. "Then I am to believe the general rumour that she's perfectly good and sweet, and in the right of this unfortunate matter?"

"Do people say that?" Claire asked in turn, very pleased. "I know how good she is, I know her sweetness—no one better. She's the dearest girl."

"She's very lovely," said Burmance.

"She's a gem, poor darling," Claire said. "I'll go to her. Can I give you a lift anywhere?"

She found the poor darling quietly at her old room and took her out for the rest of the day. The meeting was somewhat awkward; there was no baby to pet; Claire having wisely left that convenient young person at home. From her two years' experience of exceedingly happy married life, she intended to harangue Zoë. The girl sat with face averted. Claire melted. They drove about, hand in hand, a gentle pressure supplying explanations until the house was gained and they could closely embrace. No scolding, no judgment, no harsh advice was given then. Zoë was immensely grateful. She was at home with this gentle friend. Claire was dissolved in tears.

Passing through the town on their return from the country-house, they saw and were seen by Mr Jewell-Brown. Zoë murmured what she knew of him as they drove on. He calculated, as he watched the dwindling carriage, the time it would take Zoë to walk from the house of the Burmances—whither he guessed the sister of Burmance was going—to her own humble lodging. If she intended to traverse that

insignificant distance on foot, he might waylay her, and carry her off to Wychthwaite at Paris.

A soft warmth in the air revivified all the passers-by. Boys whistled, girls walked with a swing, men threw their coats open and carried their hats in their hands. Exhilaration was breathed from the delicious atmosphere. Mr Jewell-Brown felt the desire to excel his fellows in carrying off the lady. He waited hopefully for her return, with an air of sportsmanship. His reckoning and surmise were correct; he saw her tripping alone into the very trap he had so cunningly laid. Wychthwaite's departure had encouraged her to so bold a step. The roads were quiet, the town busied otherwhere. She came on without fear. Jewell-Brown hailed a carriage and stood to wait for her. She perceived it and him, guessing instantaneously at his plan. Escape was fully possible. She had but to make five steps into the main road and call, and every man would be at her side. The exhilarating air emboldened her also: she preferred to defy him. In the still road, the shrill whisper he addressed to the coachman was audible to her, more so than a low-voiced command would have been. He had bidden the man drive like the devil, when he heard "Go it!" Zoë arrived briskly at the carriage side, evaded Jewell-Brown's arm, slipped like lightning round behind the carriage, he in pursuit, jumped lightly in the other side, crying "Go it!" at the top of her voice, and was off, as like the devil as the driver and the horse could attain, before Jewell-Brown could seize her manœuvre. He gaped in admiration.

"What a girl!" he meditated. "What a regular daisy! There's no coming up with her."

Zoë kept the story to herself. She was highly amused by the young man's attempt to abduct her singlehanded and in open day. Recalling the scene, she laughed till the tears ran down her face. For his part Jewell-Brown appreciated the comic side of it as hugely, he laughed in private when he remembered the harlequinade of it all, and his lorn state in the road. The fun of it seemed to his mind a bond between them; he sat to pen a note, in which his admiration—entirely respectful—found vent, and his contrition was expressed for any offence he might have caused her. Fool and knave he might be, but the letter was the letter of a man, frank and gentlemanly. Zoë read into the letter as much as the writer had meant. This man, of old her enemy, was become her staunch ally.

"A friend at the Embassy," she said, "I begin to triumph already," she replied to the letter in the best of faith, as it had been sent. An offer, disingenuously worded, to stand by her in case of need was candidly accepted. She had triumphed indeed.

More than by that one conquest she was victorious. The public was on her side. The Embassy was—not on Wychthwaite's. Claire talked to her brother, did more, she brought him face to face with her Zoë, and the frequenter of courts was won. Unofficial chatter, even on royal lips, brought her name in at times. On more than one occasion the royal box had been occupied. She was admired in high circles for her grace, and her independence. It was said by the very

select that they liked a wench to show spirit, damn it. When her case and name were discussed, in Burmance's presence, he held a brief for her.

To Zoë, sitting at an improvised meal of pancakes and crabs over her fire at Madame Plisse's with Lalage shelling shrimps for an omelette to come, was brought a great and important missive sealed as gloriously as the writs but of less terrifying import. With mouth full of crab, she read in jerks to the delighted Lalage, a command to go, with her costume (my tights, you know, Lalage) to dance before the gorgeous company assembled in honour of high persons.

A vision of triumphs throughout Europe dazzled Lalage. Zoë saw in the missive the protection she still felt she needed sorely against Wychthwaite. Lalage, with a bad cold, refrained from embracing this friend of Ambassadorial delegates and regal persons, but kissed her hair and gloves fondly. They sat long into the night talking the matter over.

Burmance it was who had recommended the dancer in high places. He welcomed her and handed her to some equally great lady, who took her in hand until the dance was ready. She had been bidden to take her own accompanist. The Campobossis had advised Pian-piano, and with him she had arrived at the royal palace. Without his music she could not have danced. For the first time she felt his calf-like stare a support, his vague manner of playing a comfort.

She hurried to Lalage, full of her experience, to find the girl ill in bed. It was necessary to have a doctor. Zoë ran out again, to collide with Pian-piano who had sheepishly followed her and not yet gone

away. She sent him in one direction and herself sped in another. Madame Cari-Pède was brought; the doctor came without haste, as doctors do; Pian-piano waited about to fetch and carry: the doctor's orders were speedily accomplished by him, he ran to a chemist's, rushed back again, carried messages, and did all manner of odd jobs in a definite and useful fashion little to be expected of so moonstruck a swain. For his trouble he had the reward of walking home with Zoë; he had been with her, or working for her nearly the whole day.

Zoë returned to her friend at the earliest possible moment the next day. She gathered that Lalage must still be very ill, when she saw in the sickroom her father, mother, and the others of the family. Zoë held Bertrand's hand for a brief moment. The girl before them, so dear to all, prevented the meeting being awkward. All felt too deeply the imminence of tragedy to remember the trivial happenings of three or more years ago.

Zoë was left alone with Lalage and sat quietly beside her; the sick girl wished to talk. "Talk to me about your affairs," she said, over and over again.

In great distress, lest she should do harm, Zoë pretended to be highly humorous; she gave an account of her late adventure and tried, with all manner of feeble wit, less to distract Lalage's than her own thoughts. She talked unwearyingly, resuscitating all the idle chatter she could recollect to divert the invalid. The name of Burmance was constantly repeated. More than once she had to explain to the sick girl who she was.

"Are you happy now, Zoë?" she asked.

"N—not happy, Lalage. But not unhappy either."

"You'd be worse with your Viche—you know?"

"Much, much, my dear. I can never return to him."

Lalage mused.

"How would you be happiest?" she feebly asked, turning her head to face Zoë.

"With my Lalage quite well again."

"Ah, but how really?" insisted the sick girl.

"If I loved and were loved again," Zoë vaguely said.

"I'll tell Mary," the girl remarked. She dozed fitfully and Zoë prayed. Long she knelt by the bed in supplication to Mary, not for her happiness, but for the restoration of her friend. She felt strengthened and reassured when she rose from her knees. Lalage quietly slept. The mother had gone to rest, having watched all night. Zoë had no idea that Lalage had awakened, until the girl put a feverish hand on hers.

"If I could see my happiness, I'd take it," she said clearly.

"What do you mean?" cried Zoë, struck by the change in her tone and startled by the suddenness of Lalage's movement.

"I'd take my happiness, if I could see it," said she again. Zoë did not press her to explain. Even to her ignorant eye, the girl's state was perilous. She fell into another doze before the mother returned, still weary, to take her turn of watching.

"Send for me if she's not so well to-night," Zoë

said. "I'll come in any case some time to watch while you rest."

The old difference on Bertrand's account was forgotten. There was no thought in either woman's mind, save of Lalage.

Chapter XXIX

tells of one of Earth's daughters, from whose shoulders the burden of life was early lifted

ZOË left the stage to find Bertrand in the wings, he came to bid her return to Lalage; she hurried straightway to the roomy garret where the girl lay. Bertrand had told her on the way that his sister could not recover: the doctor had been with her, just before he had run off for Zoë and the words were his.

"We've given up hope," he said, dully.

Zoë left him downstairs with that sad sentence on his lips. The mother toiled aimlessly about the room, arranging furniture already in place, tidying what was quite neat, trying to weary her mind by wearying her already tired body. Zoë sent a message by Bertrand to her own lodging and prepared with a heavy heart to watch through the night. Without words, they settled to their helpless waiting. From time to time the mother continued to rise and move some trifle, to dust a table or breathe on the window pane and polish it. A quiet company of visitors, the father, Bertrand and the girl's lover, Cassis, were admitted. Each kissed her brow. She slumbered uneasily, unmoved by the visit. The three men went as stealthily as they had come, fearing to discompose the girl, already unconscious to sound and sight. The mother dozed or wept querulously; she felt aggrieved that there was nothing to be done.

They did not speak to each other. Zoë held commune with her God.

Lalage never stirred; her breathing sounded loud in the still night: the noise of it was only broken by the insistent church-clock near at hand, which struck off quarter by quarter the remnant of her life.

The room grew cool, a light wind brushed the window. Zoë kindled the stove: the mother woke to find her at work, and without a word, pushed her away from the task which she noisily completed herself. She was glad of the little trouble the stove caused. Zoë regretted her inexperience in not thinking to fire the wood before. She knelt in devout absorption by the bed-foot, reciting her prayers and reading, in her book of hours, meditations suited to the tragic time.

On her knees, near the lamp which was on a low table behind the bed-foot so that Lalage's face was screened from its direct glare, she implored Mary to be at hand.

The wind wandered past the casement, Zoë figured the wings of Lalage's guardian angel and his band brushing past, wavering and swooping outside; she believed that the hosts waited without for the dying girl, whose soul, slipping through the open window, should stand on the foot of her guardian spirit and so mount to Peter's gate.

Brother Frederic was brought by the waiting father; Zoë did not rise from her knees. The blessed oil lay on the sick girl's lips and brow. The priest prayed by the bed-head, his office finished. The father and mother sat hand in hand with faces turned to the dying girl. A great silence fell. The father rose and set the window ajar to give the freed soul passage to the hosts that

stayed without. The dead girl's life had gone out as lightly as the flame of a candle, blown by Azrael's breath. The wind freshened and rattled the casement, breaking the great stillness that was above them all. The mother stared uncomprehendingly. When she perceived the loss she had suffered, she made pitiful outcry. She threw herself across the bed, crying to her Lalage to speak, to speak, to speak. The bereaved father bore her tenderly from the room. Brother Frederic went slowly out: in the house, people were stirring quietly. Zoë heard the priest go down the street, his steps dying gradually away, but audible to the very last.

The mother came back, stronger since her weeping: she brushed her child's hair and made the bed neat, crying all the while. She drew the sheet over the girl's face. Her sobs increased in force; Zoë could not bear to hear her: her own icy fortitude broke down: she gave way to her tears. Long time she wept until too weary to do so more, her own sobs ceasing, she became aware that the father and brother had come in and were sitting with bowed heads on the other side of the bed. Their heavy breathing, irregularly drawn, betrayed them. Zoë prayed for the living as much as for the dead.

She followed the girl's soul to the gate of Heaven and recited in her mind, for Peter's ear, the list of her many virtues: the girl on her knees thought only of the Christ-like qualities of her dear dead friend, in no wise remembering her failings. The sweet soul gone forth from the clay that rested silently there was of God's own fashioning—the work of His master hand.

The early light released Zoë from her watching.

Drawing down the sheet she looked long and wonderingly at the sublimely peaceful face, then leaned down and kissed the white brow. Without adieux to the other watchers she made her way into the street. Opposite the house Cassis was patiently standing; he beckoned to Zoë and she obeyed the gesture.

"How is she?" he asked.

"She is dead," Zoë whispered with averted head.

For a space he answered nothing, then, in a quiet voice, "O Lalage, O my girl!"

They stood in silence, Zoë restraining her grief in the presence of his restraint. His face was disordered, but he was still master of his voice when he spoke. "You must get home, Zoë," he said at last. "Come, you've had a weary night." She took his supporting arm and went blindly back to Madame Plisse's. At the door she dismissed him with a wave of the hand, fearing to speak. "Good-bye, Zoë," he said, gently. "We must be friends."

She could not turn away before her tears burst forth. At the sound of her sobbing, his passion overcame him; he raised his hand menacingly to the sky that curved like a granite dome. "If the sun should dare to shine to-day," he cried, "I should straightway curse my God."

Chapter XXX

is reminiscent of Sorrow and the Herald of Peace

ZOË slept till late and awoke refreshed. She sat up in bed and went over the events of the past night. Tears she shed none, but her heart weighed sadly within her bosom. A veil hung between her and her joyous perception of life; everything seemed of evil portent, she drooped physically, seeing no hope. The outer day, nearing noon, matched with her mood, the sky still brooded grey and mysterious without light or rain.

The poignancy of her distress was less grief for her loss than the tremor of youth and health brought for the first time face to face with the appalling fact of death. Lalage shone radiantly about her. From that night when her spirit had passed, Zoë thought of her no longer as the placid, easily-amused girl; her memory hung ethereally illumined and sanctified, in the nebulæ of Zoë's mind.

She rose and went out. When, in the course of her aimless walk, she faced the corner which had witnessed their first renewal of friendship as women, she trembled for loneliness. Her thoughts ran widlly on, to be brought to a sudden halt by the realisation of Lalage's death. This then was what it meant—loneliness for Zoë, grief for Zoë, anguish for Zoë. These bodings pursued her throughout the day, she pirouetted with them at night.

She was not newly to learn the goodness of those she

loved, but again to realise with a full heart how truly she was encompassed by kindliness. It was well for her that the theatre claimed her much. Every one found something for her to do. The manager invented at rehearsals new movements, which she had to practise till she was ready to fall for weariness. Martha developed an unaccustomed timidity and would not go marketing alone; she would call on Zoë before eight o'clock and take her breakfast with her, afterwards insisting on her company to the shops. Amalia had music to be copied, for which there must be no delay. Claire must have her of an afternoon to help with beautiful things for her god-child. Even the late Miss Tauzy, moved by the sudden and dreadful fate of Zoë's friend, unbent so far as to call on Zoë herself and take her, a very unwilling companion, to help choose an overmantle. From one occupation the girl was harried to another: night alone brought her time for brooding. At night the waste of loneliness was about her, her grief was felt until she bowed beneath it. The buoyancy of her youth had suffered a cruel blow. Work was her salvation. Sometimes she returned to her lodging so tired that she slept before she could say her prayers.

Claire's habit of sending for her in the afternoon meant that she returned to the town in time for the theatre. Often she would be sent back in the carriage. At times she elected to walk. Peggy was called on to bear her company. Peggy rebelled sorely against such foot-exercise, she was frequently not the only escort. Vague rumours of "nasty customers" got about; Claire's brother would make one of the little party returning to Brussels. When he was by, Peggy would

step out behind, her thoughts duly resentful: when they reached the streets, her nose eager for titillating fumes. She sniffed up their odorous invitation, eyed the imbibers of nectar gloomily and with a gluttonous air, and passed courageously on. Staunch to her self-imposed pledge made, now long since, on Zoë's wedding day, she remained temperate. She was sorely assailed: human nature cried out for richer and more savoury stimulants than coffee; she stood firm, eschewing, like a female Sir Galahad, alcohol in every form. Her temper had not improved, but her health had. She slept regularly, was cleaner in person and, adorned by a seemly and shapely cloak of Zoë's making, she made what some persons, catholic in taste, might think a good figure. She was certainly no longer ridiculous to the eye. Sulk as she might, she was in reality well content to be seen daily in company with her adored Zoë.

It would be invidious to whisper that one person regretted Peggy's abstention; that person a Brother: that Brother our Brother Frederic: that he had found in her a very handy and nasty taunt with which to wound Brother Robert, that he missed Miss Peggy's unpastoral visits. It would, we reiterate, be far from generous to allude to this. But it is known that he put it down to the black account held by him against Zoë.

Claire held Peggy to be a valuable person. The two would confabulate lengthily, always about Zoë, nothing but Zoë. The interviews led to Claire's asking Zoë to come to live with her. She was sincere; she foresaw returning depression, dreadful morbidity, if the girl continued to live alone. Zoë considered the plan, grateful for the offer. She thought it over deeply, and

refused. It would mean, as she well knew, giving up the stage and becoming a regular servant in the household, however pleasant, about Claire.

"I love my dancing," she gave as an excuse. "And you can't, my dear, have a dancer living in the house, can you?"

Claire demurred. "You've been to Court." She was sure of one point. "You must not live alone."

There were more reasons that she had in mind to urge against that solitude. Appearances cried loudly against it. A wife separated, in such circumstances, from her husband must walk most warily. Claire vaguely suggested the Convent; the horror of Zoë's countenance was feeble compared with the look on Sister Superior's face when the astounding suggestion filtered through to her.

Zoë promised to meditate further. With her mind full of the idea, she went to her dance. She found the manager distracted. The contortionist had "ricked" himself somewhere (as his letter of explanation termed it) vital, and couldn't dream of juggling himself in the existing circumstances. His note, received only ten minutes before the door opened, went on to say that in consequence of the shock, would the manager please send his salary at once, Saturday being so far off (it was Thursday), and his rick being perhaps a matter of weeks. The manager had been fulminating until Zoë's arrival. She was late; not for her dance, but for the beginning of the performance. Campobossi also was late.

The tenor was allowed to take three recalls, not overheartily given, to atone for the ricked contortionist. No Campobossi! Zoë went on, danced to the stare and

sickly smile of Pian-piano, was recalled, went through her affair again. No Campobossi! The ventriloquial juggler went on out of turn. He was throwing his voice all over the place desperately long after he should have done to eke the few performers out, when Amalia rushed in. The manager stood in the wings projecting *his* voice, embellished with a sibilant oath here and there, with admirable directness right into the ear of the despairing ventriloquist.

"My dear boy's ill," Amalia announced. "The poor wretch started and had to come back. He can't come. He broke down. I've taken the precaution of locking him in."

"Can't come?" the manager said.

"I'll sing," said Amalia, less explosively.

"Are you dressed?"

"Marvellously."

"Put on some rouge then, my poor girl, and be ready at the tenor's call. We've had enough of him to sicken everyone. And this devil too. We'll be all right now. Fit as ninepence! Dab some red on her face, Peg."

Zoë performed that artistic office. The ventriloquist, released, cast his voice through the keyhole of Zoë's door in hoarse thanks to Amalia for coming.

Amalia *was* dressed "marvellously" in a blue silk gown of past fashion. "Get some fashion into me, if you can, my dear," she said, running an eye over some music she held in her hand. A tweak here and a pin there resolved the dress into something quite stylish. Zoë rummaged for a gay scarf, bound it about the bodice to hide the scant folds, produced artificial roses in

abundance for hair and belt. Amalia was entirely passive.

"My poor lad," she said, "his breathing is dreadful. Don't hide my elbows, Zoë, there are not many women of my age could show a dimple just there, eh? How old do you think I am? Fifty-one, I am. I know I only look forty and most of the time I feel thirty: and to-night if you could lace me just a little tighter I'll be twenty-five, not a minute more. I used to have a lovely voice once, I'm proud to say. I had serious ideas of coming out in Grand Opera. Campobossi shared them. We were remarkably alone in those great ideas, my love. We often laugh now about it. Poor, dear lad, I hope he's easier in his chest. They say inhaling camphor is a very good thing; do you know it? I believe it relieves the breathing wonderfully. Has Peggy told you, my dear, that we're not married? I hoped she would. We've always meant to, ever since I was twenty-one, my age when I first came to him. We were constantly telling each other, for twenty years at the very least, when we've got the time *and* the money, we'll go off and get married. You'll laugh when I tell you we've never had a minute in those thirty years. Or perhaps—since that I've only said so for a joke. I was making him laugh that way just before I came out. I thought if he laughed it might help his breathing. You know a little thing like that often helps the chest wonderfully. But I often thought also, that if we didn't get on very well, we could so easily go apart—so many professional people do; however I don't suppose I ever thought that seriously. People don't live together for thirty happy years, and work together—and go hungry

together—just to quarrel at the end. I love my Pipi just as much now—more, yes, more—than I did when he was slim enough to play Accari in the 'Brigand's Mistress.' My poor dear lad, I do hope he'll take his physic. I said you'd laugh just now, my dear, when you heard I'd never been married. And you did smile. But you may think I'm immoral, being brought up as you were in a convent. No one could have a greater respect for the good Sisters than I, but I don't—I can't think they're any better than we. I believe, if any of them had met a man like Campobossi before she was out of her novitiate, she'd have left all to follow him. Men like my Campobossi aren't so common though; and a good thing too. Otherwise we should have no religious orders. And who could teach the children? There's Mr Burmance, your friend. He's a Campobossi. Honest and faithful, as my dear boy is. Honesty and fidelity are two very good points in a man. All the fancy virtues can come later. Am I neat, my dear? Oh, I look gorgeous."

She ran out to be announced by the manager as the Caramalia. Zoë mused dreamily. A thought took form. She wrote a note to Amalia and left it for her reading. It suggested their moving to handsomer quarters with Zoë as a member of the household. It was written impulsively, but the morning, which brought Amalia's cordial assent to the plan, did not bring disapproval of the night's action.

Martha, learning of the plan, was heartily glad. "Anything that Amalia has a hand in is good," she said. "She's the best creature in the world for you to live

with. Anything she recommends has everything to—recommend it."

"It has," added Joseph (Joseph under Tauzocracy), "the hall-mark of excellence."

"We value her opinion highly."

"She is the modern Pallas-Athene."

"She's got a large heart, my dear."

"And is so intelligent that were she even a shade less beautiful and fascinating, every man alive would hate her."

"You are a stupid," said Martha. "No one would ever dream of saying so."

"I stand corrected," said Joseph.

His pertness delighted Zoë. She laughed more heartily than she had done for a long time. He blossomed in the appreciation of his repartee. His practical spouse had a way of withering the buds of conversation and wit that sprouted on his lips. He basked in the sun of what he considered her admiration. The delicious idea that he was admired led him to present Zoë with a beautiful cardboard casket of very highly scented soap. Zoë smelt it, thanked him, still laughing gaily, and went home to make her arrangements for moving. The soap was given with the strictest injunction to secrecy, to Peggy. The present had its use. She washed continually, but she was very highly perfumed, too much so for Zoë's taste. Campobossi admired the scent, and it was well that he did, for Amalia and Zoë intended to translate Peggy to the new abode, soap or no soap.

The apartment was chosen, wall-papers were selected (something of the gaudiest, but very cheerful); furniture was rummaged out of dreadful rookeries in back

streets, polished abnormally, and all of it discovered to be real something-or-other without exception. The three optimists, with Peggy at their heel, spent hours with their mouths full of nails and tin-tacks piercing them at all angles, on their knees before these historically remarkable articles, stuffing, upholstering, covering, fixing springs, sewing repp and damask, tangling their legs with gimp, hammering fingers sore, running sharp wires into their hands, bringing each other blackened thumbnails for inspection, screaming and staunching blood, and throughout it all, laughing so heartily, that the other inhabitants of the block began to think that an insane carpenter had taken the third floor and had a pleasant way of trying to kill his family between jobs. The three became too tired to hit themselves any more.

Campobossi went for a whole day with his hand bound up, but bread-and-suet poultices being applied to him every hour until the splinter of a genuine Fourdinois cabinet gave it up and came out. Zoë herself believed she had swallowed a tin-tack, and she and Peggy, to whom she had whispered this engrossing fear, awaited development for a week until they forgot all about it.

At the end of a fortnight, the three sat joyfully down to their first proper family meal; curtains were up, carpets were down, never a tin-tack obtruded itself. Peggy in a blue-check apron serving them, Campobossi dealt with the soup—excellent soup; Amalia made the salad—perfect salad; Zoë poured the beer—superb head on it. Peggy did everything else—miraculously well. They talked nonsense like a set of children, Peggy taking her share of the chatter. They went out, like householders—they *were* house-

holders—and shut their own doors behind them, making sure in their pockets that their own key was there. Arm and arm, with Peggy, no longer a sulky escort, behind, they arrived in state at the theatre, meaning to go home very steadily afterwards. You may suppose they didn't. They rushed helter-skelter back, Campobossi and Peggy somewhat breathless, to find the flat intact. In they pressed, sat on their own chairs, looked at their own cabinet, from which the splinter was no longer missing, and gave themselves a toast.

"The Campobossi-Caxe establishment. Long may it prosper!"

Campobossi and Amalia drank it in beer, Peggy and Zoë in chocolate, both beverages infinitely superior to nectar.

"This is my home," Zoë said, "my very first home."

She slept lightly there, honest love guarding her.

Housekeeping proved to be a serious care. Peggy would go out of a morning to return with no merchandise but the coaxing announcement that celery was very good to-day. Not lightly to be persuaded, either Amalia or Zoë, sometimes both, would get on a bonnet and go down with Peggy, bartering joyfully with the market people, and returning with the most luscious vegetables, meat, and dairy-produce ever sold for lucre on this earth.

They bought a piano. What concerts they had! Zoë practised her hour every day. What dreadful oaths, surpassing any the unconscious Campobossi could have uttered, the second and fourth floor people hissed in the solitude of their apartments. They gave supper-parties (the sweets from the pastry-cooks) and

sang glees at them. Campobossi revived a talent of improvisation, and would sit for an hour at a time, feeling his way among dominants and accidentals, while Zoë embroidered drapery for the windows and Amalia made over old dresses. They were always uneasy in mind until, from a convenient post two streets off, they saw their own flaming scarlet blinds and their own unspeakably ridiculous balcony. From that balcony, which would hold two people, standing, together they would breathe the stuffy city air, imagining fondly that the long inspirations they indulged in, from that convenient foothold, revivified them noticeably on the spot.

Silly little balcony it might be, ridiculous the tenants might be also: it was for Zoë a real home. She found pleasant rest within her own walls.

Chapter XXXI

tells of an unpleasant incident

CLAIRE approved highly of the domestic arrangements of the Campobossi-Caxe establishment. On her visits, Peggy, arriving from prolonged ablutions of an intensely perfumed order, would serve tea in the English fashion, with a minute service on the smallest possible table, and infinitesimal cakes in a silver basket. For her coming also the place was extra furbished. Its spick-and-span appearance was jealously examined by all four—Campobossi being as great an old maid as any of them—and the best of everything produced. She would come in state, carriage and pair, two genteel persons on the box-seat, her own gown of elaborate design and voluminous folds rustling majestically up the stairs. Campobossi would be in his blue coat, a new garment, modish, with a waist cunningly suggested by the artist who had built it: front view, he was imposing; side view, he was imposing; back view, he was regal. Amalia would have on her best, no longer a dingy grey silk, but miraculously turned by Peggy and Zoë into a severe but classic garment, all spots removed and the worn pieces hidden under judicious slabs of velvet. Zoë had too many pretty things, remnants of her unfortunate trousseau. Gorgeously apparelled, they would sit about, pretending to read,

while Peggy made the teapot red-hot by furious polishing.

Indeed, say you, and why were they all so agitated, if you please? Sir or Madam, we reply, in the first place Claire came straight from Court.

That sufficed to stiffen Campobossi and to justify the waist, so deftly introduced by the tailor.

Secondly, there was any amount of influence to be worked through her. Campobossi might yet come out in royal Grand Opera. Very well, that is ample reason for Amalia's best dress, we hope.

Thirdly, Claire did not come alone. And that, alas! was Zoë's reason. The pretty baby made a second visitor, but there was yet another. And that other was, alas! Zoë's reason. But she didn't know it, bless you. Nor did the Campobossis: nor even Claire.

Other callers, for whom reception was less elaborately prepared, there were. What supper parties they indulged in! The whole theatrical world of the town ate in that scarlet parlour from time to time. Amalia fostered an idea of founding an artistic *salon*.

One visitor came oftener than Zoë cared for. Campobossi's compositions may have been meritorious; Pianpiano made it appear that they were inspired. He professed himself content to listen to them hour after hour. The process of listening included his sheepish stare at Zoë. She had a habit of seeing him well settled to his self-imposed task, and then going quietly away. She tried to believe that it was his sneering laugh at

her on her first appearance before him, years ago, that had set up her prejudice. By a lucky chance she had perceived his coming for three consecutive times, and had been able to slip away before he was in, and then to leave the flat until he had gone. On the last occasion, she spent the afternoon with Claire and returned, but not speedily, with Burmance. A note had arrived for her. Zoë had one way with all correspondence addressed to her at the theatre. Three-cornered notes to "Zoë" were frequent sources of replenishment to the fire.

"Throw it on the fire," said she. "Burn the thing."

"That I won't," said Peggy. "Addressed to you in your married name and all."

"Is it?"

"And I know who it is from."

"Whom?"

"Pian-piano. He gave it me himself."

Zoë took it unwillingly, but without repulsion. Some change in the programme had perhaps been decided at the last moment. She unfastened the paper and read.

Signed with the young man's name, which for the first time she now learnt, its purport shocked and wounded her. The proposal was, in black and white, so gross and incredible as to need reperusal before it could be fully understood. Considered in the cold fashion in which Zoë approached it, the expression and matter appeared revolting. She thought an instant, staying her hand that would have thrown it behind the fire,

enclosed it in an envelope, which she sent by Peggy with the message that the letter had been wrongly addressed, and that Mrs Wychthwaite apologised for opening it.

She believed, poor little creature, that such an action would decisively put an end to any more advances. During her dance, her eyes stole often towards the young man. His face was as usual turned towards her; his slovenly manner of playing more marked, chords broken, arpeggi and trills interpolated, the whole effect that of a musical kaleidoscope. Zoë was glad when, her recall over, she was able to evade the steady stare of his eyes.

She had scarcely regained the shelter of her apartment, whence Peggy was for the moment absent, before he entered without knock or word. She had her cloak in her hand and was preparing to pin up her hair, before resuming her dress to return home. Believing it to be Peggy who had thus walked without warning into the room, she threw her cloak across the chair and bent to pick up her hair-pins. The movement gave her sight of the door in the mirror; before it Pian-piano stood, his ugly face lit with an ingratiating smile. She turned to face him and put on her cloak speedily.

"My dear little creature," he began, in a mollifying tone, "the letter *was* meant for you, and you ought to know it. Didn't I begin it in your pretty little name? You're afraid of making yourself cheap, aren't you?"

"Kindly leave me," said Zoë, as quietly as she could.

"Kindly leave you! Oh, no, my Zozo, not yet.

If you pay me to go now—in kisses—I'll go like a shot, with you," he said, with the air of a conqueror.

Zoë trembled with growing fear. She had never anticipated such an attack; her wits escaped her. She stared in obvious dread at her assailant.

"I don't want to frighten you," he went on joyfully, "but I do like to see you trembling, my dear girl. *I'll* comfort you. Come now, Zoë, come to your Pian-piano. What, you won't? I don't believe it! Women like to be thought prudes, eh?"

Zoë hoped that he might listen to reason. "I would have you to know," she said, with a show of collected thought, "that my sending back your letter was to mean total cessation of such proposals. They disgust me. I wish you to understand that this must be the end of the discussion between us. Now have the goodness to leave me."

"There's a rigmarole!" cried Pian-piano playfully. "Quite done? Well, come along."

He advanced towards her, his arms outstretched; she managed to dip her head and run to the door: she had turned the handle when he put his arms about her and kissed her on the neck. She fled from the room, leaving her cloak in his grasp, and ran away along the passage in her stage dress. Wild with fear, she made for the manager's room, but was too terrified to find the handle of the door: her hand swept the panel, caught the knob, but pushed and pulled it instead of turning it: she heard a step and believed it to be Pian-piano pursuing her. She screamed; the manager opened to her and she ran in to the opposite corner of the room, imploring

him to protect her. The under-manager was present, the two men were at a loss ; one went sagely in search of a woman, and Zoë forced herself to be silent until Amalia came. Amalia bore her off to her little room again and dressed her. She grew calmer and related her unsavoury adventure. Amalia forbore to question her or to seek further information than the girl, still greatly agitated, chose to give. It became generally believed that some *roué* of the town had strayed behind the scenes and thus vilely accosted her. Zoë thought fit to say nothing about the real offender.

Pian-piano's comment on the events of the evening was addressed to Zoë quietly at their next meeting. "When, whoever it is at present had done with you," he smilingly said, "you won't perhaps find me quite so willing to take you on."

The incident had its result in a definite idea to return to Wychthwaite for the protection of his name and the rehabilitation of her own character, which she thought sullied by this brutal speech. Long and bitter meditation prompted her to write ; she addressed at the first her ally, Mr Jewell-Brown, his offer to help might, she conceived, be construed into willingness to mediate ; the plan of approaching Wychthwaite through his friend and her adherent seemed good. Later she paraphrased the letter, addressing it directly to her husband. Drafts of it lay about in her desk for days. Now it began, "My dear husband," now it besought the help of a possible mediator, Jewell-Brown, Brother Frederic, the secretary of the Embassy. Its substance was invariably the same. She thought right to return to her

husband, and she intended, though it should wound her very soul, to do that right.

The letter written overnight was condemned at morning as too hysterical: the sketch of the day was torn into shreds later as too business-like.

Peggy watched this pother of writing and writing and again writing with suspicion. She glowered over Zoë's shoulder and darted angry glances at the delicate script. English or French, or Chinese, for that matter, might return her stare from the paper; written thought was to her no more than a series of arachnidian scrawlings. She persuaded, with honeyed words, her dear lady to write her name down. The thin, angular letters were no whit like the dropsical ZOË of the theatre poster; Peggy was hurt, cherishing a private belief that Zoë had deceived her. She went straightway into her kitchen and burnt the scrap of paper, registering in its smoke a vow to ask for no more autographs.

The continual scratching of ink on paper displeased her utilitarian soul. As did also the dire waste of the sheets when covered with their hieroglyphs. One leaf followed another into the flame of the candle. Twice in one week the tiny inkpot was filled—once to overflowing—but every drop went, not poured away, nor soaked up by blotting paper, but laid on the paper in loops and points and dots and lines, miraculously dissimilar. The knife was for ever being used to bring the pen to a fine point, or (monstrous to divulge) the pen itself was consumed by fire and a new one taken, whereas every housewife knows that nothing brings the fainting "to" more quickly than the wrong end of a quill

lightly singed. A careful woman can scarcely observe all this without dismay and headshakings. Such unusual energy in the direction of writing boded some ill result. She adopted a habit of bobbing into the room at short intervals, dish-clout or broom in hand, to see if the abominable process was still going on. The abominable process usually was; the narrow pen running from left to right and from left to right with hardly a pause. A secret suspicion, fostered in all its hideousness, had, like the fox of Sparta, to be made known at length.

"I know what you're up to, my Missis," Peggy said, wagging her head ominously.

"So do I. Be quiet."

"You're writing a play."

Zoë proved the matter to Peggy beyond a doubt by becoming irritable and snapping her desk.

"Don't be silly, Peggy," she cried; "I am only writing a letter. I wish you'd keep to the kitchen quietly for once."

"Letter," Peggy was heard to repeat with a sniff. "If it's a love-letter I won't look."

Zoë deferred her task until she might be alone. Her own room at the flat, half-sitting-room, half-bedroom, with the bed screened for the day behind gaudy chintz curtains, was her only refuge. At every entry of the Campobossis she had to put away her writing. She went boldly at length into her own room, carrying the ink thither, and locked the door. With leisure and calm, she set about the task more hopefully.

She wrote the letter fairly, set her seal upon it,

addressed it to Mr Jewell-Brown, and put it ready for sending. So it lay on her writing-case for a weary time: the ink darkening, the seal biting close, the folds taking unalterable form, the superscription showing clear and purple whenever the desk was opened: its very presence lending an air of connubial propriety and respectability to the dainty useless accessories of a girl's treasure box.

Chapter XXXII

tells of what is bitter sweet

HER hand traced no more letters, nor did she go in fear of Pian-piano or any other man. A sweet restfulness possessed her, giving her quiet sleep by night and a mind free of cares by day.

If she had her enemies, she had also her friends. Was there not Claire? Claire seemed so kind, so amiable, and her little entourage so pleasant. Take Burmance from it and its light was gone. Claire may be as kind, as amiable as ever, her circle no less agreeable, but Zoë would not find them so.

She had an insatiable hunger for friendship, in every new acquaintance she observed a potential friend. Her company widened generously under this régime.

Burmance was to be her friend even as were Claire and her husband. Unwittingly she read into friendship much that is more often called by another name. She longed, during his absence, to hear his calm voice speaking with deep intonation. Delicious bitterness of discontent was hers. Let him talk as he would, his very tone gave rest; let him look as he might, the sight of him was peace; but her heart wanted more. Her heart was ever alert for more: she held no commune with it; she felt it stirring, bird-like, within her bosom, and questioned nothing; she marvelled at its faint joys and its disappointments and left it unrebuked.

There could be, she felt, such sweet friendship between him and her; perfect faith, perfect liking, without ever a thought of a nearer relationship intruding. No heart searchings should be theirs, no bitter sorrowing for trifles, no angry partings, and therefore, no tender reconciliations. A handshake should be their closest embrace, a use of the Christian name their fondest address, an hour in each other's company now and then, spent in friendly chatter, their greatest pleasure. She drew up this programme mentally, reviewed it, was vastly pleased with her own judgment, and meditated proudly how pleased he would be to find such a mind in her. A man, she knew, is always glad to find a woman above the sentimental, men hate women to give way to their feelings: *which*, she did not, to herself, specify.

A sigh, presumably of relief, escaped her when she recalled that she was married, that legal state precluding all but friendship between her and any other, but she approved highly of his singleness. Wisely, she forbore again to pause to analyse her reason for that self-gratulation.

A vista of pleasant hours, happy meetings, perfect understanding, lay before her mental sight, delighting her in lonely moments. A walk taken in his company confirmed her notion: his frequent presence (with Amalia and the obsequious Campobossi in attendance) at the little flat strengthened it yet more. Life lay mapped out before them full of quiet joy. Her dance was lighter, her look gayer. She could face the pianist without fear, and think of the past without pain.

Amalia guessed and watched—she saw no harm.

Peggy guessed and frowned—she was alarmed to see. Campobossi guessed and smiled, seeing all good. Who else should guess but Burmance, and what should he do but sigh ?

He had been content to love her humbly, while she was his kind friend. He knew his heart well and, manlike, gravely heard its plea before he decided how their life should go. While she was his kind friend, he was able to act the same part.

No quiet hours of friendship, no handshake, no bright speech should content him more, now that he had seen the light of Zoë's love glowing in her eyes.

" I love," he had said, " I am hers." Now his cry was : " She loves : she is mine, mine, mine ! "

He had no more faith in himself : he went forthwith to the flat, but forbore to ring, turned away, and, fearing his own passion, stayed away. The hour of midnight led him past the house, and the moon beheld him watching the tiny balcony far above the road ; he went thither for peace, but in his heart of hearts he suffered. A second day came, he repeated the manœuvre of mounting to the door—and going silently away. He had strength to deprive himself and her of the joy of meeting. A battle waged continually within his mind : his heart cried out for her love, his conscience demanded that her honour be considered.

He was waylaid accidentally by Campobossi and taken by that good man to the apartment. Zoë met him with reproach, openly spoken when the Italian had left them alone.

" You said you were coming on Wednesday," she said, " and after all didn't. A friend should be faithful."

He turned his face from her, "I'm not a friend, Zoë," he answered. "I'm a lover."

The silence that fell beween them was inexpressibly sweet to her: she nursed the word at her glowing heart, her eyes lowered, her cheeks pale. Her valued friend was become her lover: kindness was love, service was desire: the image of friendship held at arm's length was speedily changed, and its sweet new form was held close to her bosom setting her aflame. Her lips refused to speak, unless they might cry all delight, and that she denied them: her eyes might not look, but her ears listened and heard.

"God forgive me, Zoë," he said, "I never meant to tell you. It was a sin against our friendship."

She was still unable to answer, but bravely she raised her eyes, dimmed with happy tears. She looked on him and wept silently.

"Say which it may be, Zoë, love or friendship," he went on. "It must be love, I can't tear the beauty and the pain of it out of my heart now."

For answer she put out her hand. He stood beside her and gently raised her face, stooping: she rose to him and their kiss was utterly sweet. Zoë dropped her arms and freed herself.

"It is wrong," she gave him to consider. He watched the colour flowing in her cheek and smiled.

"Yet nothing else can be right," he answered.

"I can never be yours."

"You love me," he stated.

"I belong to him."

"That you do not," he cried. "You are mine." The phrase recalled his formula: "While I loved you

I was yours. Now that you love me, you are mine, mine, mine."

She gave him both hands again for a moment. "I must think," she said; "let me think."

He was little afraid of her meditation. He walked away to the window for an instant. Released, she was free to consider. Her little desk lay on the table: her hand strayed to it, unlocked it, took out the fatal letter. From his station he watched her fondly, attaching no meaning to her action.

"I must have a few days," she said, balancing the letter on her hand.

"You are mine now, and will be then," he said, all lover at last. The thought drew him to her side again.

"Don't tempt me," she said. "Don't force me. I can't decide—I must let my heart grow calm before I decide. Let me see you no more till I send for you."

"That will be soon," he smiled, confident in her love.

"I shall think often of you," she assured him.

"I know that," he said, then he grew warm again. "Zoë, let your heart lead you."

She grew pale at the idea. That way, she knew, led straightway into his arms. He noted her pallor and her hesitancy, guessed rightly at their cause, and bravely forbore to plead.

"I will wait," he said. "You are my law; I will do as you bid me. But, O Zoë, remember that my heart is aflame for you, and have mercy on me."

"I will not forget," whispered she.

"I had hoped you might be ice, that I could thaw you," he went on, "but I feel the glow of your heart here in mine. You *are* mine."

"Come when I write," said she. The hand of friendship was outheld, and by him refused.

"Your lips, Zoë," he demanded.

"Not again," cried she, in affright: the touch of his mouth would have overcome her. She persisted, he gave way. Their hands met, his was very loth to let hers go. The long delicious clasp was over. He sighed, said nothing, turned away. She recalled him. He came in a stride.

"Let me at any rate kiss your hair," he said.

"No," she said, firmly. He intended to have his way: he took her dainty head between his warm strong hands and kissed her silken hair lingeringly. Zoë's heart hungered for more: the letter slipped from her fingers. Its fall reminded her of her plight.

"Go, my lover," she said gently, and strove to put a calm ending to the scene by giving him the missive to post.

So it happened that Burmance himself took the fateful writing forth in his hand and Zoë's heart within his own.

Chapter XXXIII

sighs

ALAS for the prestige of the lost lover!

This was being loved as a woman desires to be. To have one's kisses asked for is delicious; fine is it also to have them torn from one, brute strength is a glorious thing; but how much more magnificent than either is it to obey the commanding lover, to resist awhile, to be ordered to obey, and to do it. The mean had been skilfully found and followed: not implorings, not ravishings, were the way with one woman, nor were they the way of one man: his manner of wooing was the fashion she had with all her inconsistent soul desired. Her capitulation was full.

Zoë's hand lingered on her hair as she brushed it: the touch of her lover's mouth was yet on it, the sweet moistness of his kiss still between her lips.

One night she spent in vain imaginings, in delicious anguish of dreams, no pleasant sleep was hers on this occasion: she was in chains, tossing imprisoned. Between a kiss and another kiss she roved delightedly for a time, to find again and again that beyond those two celestial landmarks she might not go. Night's friendly darkness hid her blushes, its quiet enabled her to wander in thought through the forbidden way: from heights above she looked with his hand in hers: in idea she descended into its fertile plains, he ever at her side.

She grew parched, the taste of love on her mouth was her torture as well as her joy; the remembered savour of their kiss slaked her thirst, yet set her thirsting afresh. All the kisses of life would not have brought satiety to her desirous lips. Day broke calmly above her; she remembered in discomfort the dawning of another day and how it had started her on foot to the town left over night in all joy. This dawn brought no greater hope than that: but it was richer, as life should ever after be richer, by the memory of two minutes of love's delight.

When the dawn hardened to whiteness she rose, unrefreshed, knowing the real anguish of love. The day was dull and heavy: clouds in profusion threatened rain, a sullen calm was in the air: no sun appeared to gild the whiteness of the sky. Zoë looked out in dismay; this meant no walk for her. She decided that Nature was cruel, but recollected that she had sent away her cavalier. She made up her mind to walk forth, to weary herself for the coming night. She dressed slowly, keeping a look-out at the unchanging sky, and sat down when ready at the window, her rosary in her hand. She went steadily, with moving lips and the devout signs of her occupation, from prayer to prayer. Constantly she found herself with her lips in her palm where his fingers had clasped it, or surprised herself stroking her glossy head where he had kissed it: at each interruption she felt her heart heavy as lead; her prayers rose slowly, each interrupted one was begun anew. Needlework occupied her hands and eyes: it was put aside for a book: the volume was a collection of pious thoughts, each intended to be the focus of a meditation. Her meditations progressed without

reference to the guide. The noises of day-time rang through the house; she went in to the general meal.

The hideousness of sin now began to obtrude itself vaguely in the pleasaunce of perfect bliss. The Campobossis marvelled at her gloom, the breakfast hour was usually one of light chatter with them, as they sat side by side, enjoying their coffee. They overflowed with affectionate care for her; Campobossi revelled in attentions of a fidgety sort, he ran to and fro, buttering a roll, vociferating for Peggy to reboil the milk, unlocking the genuine Fourdinois cabinet to get out a box of special biscuits. Amalia was calmer, but not less attentive. Zoë was glad of the pother, she deprecated their fears, but suffered all their attentions, nibbled a biscuit, drank the milk as hot as her tongue could bear it, and strove to join, with her usual verve, their gay and loving chatter.

She eyed them kindly; they presented themselves to her as a parable; the illustration of her own need seemed to glow in comparison with their relation; she recalled their purity, their honour. No man scorned them, they held their high place wherever they went, yet they were not married; Campobossi was still the lover. At this reflection Zoë took heart of grace. No ties held Amalia; no husband could chain her; she was unattached elsewhere. Poor Zoë perceived where her chief sin should lie.

She made a mighty pretence of dismissing the subject entirely. The kisses returned deliciously reminiscent on lip and hair. She saved herself from a complete recapitulation of the night's defection by recalling distinctly the feeling of Pian-piano's undesired embrace;

she found the interpolation successful. The cool suavity of Burmance's kiss was, after all, not very different from the burning shame of Pian-piano's. By untiring watching and sudden surprises she kept the sweeter aspect of the situation from her sight, recalling Wychthwaite, Pian-piano, her Duty, her Honour, in short, all the abstract and concrete bugbears that her lively conscience bestirred itself to suggest.

She watched the afternoon draw on with trepidancy; and was still undecided whether to risk meeting him in a walk even up to the buttoning of her second glove. Commending her own bravery, and feeling sure of her own strength, she went forth, resolved to take another way if he should be waiting. The new itinerary led her in roads parallel to the usual one, skirting squares generally crossed. At every point where her route coincided with the daily walk, she was alert for sight of the—Undesired. He remained unseen, and, sick at heart, she left her Eden with wandering steps and slow.

A fear arose that he was as gentlemanly as her husband; this convenient comparison did wonders in quickening her step. The returning passion was stopped brusquely. She swallowed the dose with a twitching mouth and climbed her stairs without another pause.

Burmance, having followed her every step of the way and watched her manœuvres, went morosely home, cursing himself for an obedient fool.

His beloved mounted, in dull mood, to her flat. Peggy announced Mrs Jewell-Brown to be waiting.

"Mister," said Zoë, aghast at the immediate success of her note.

"It's a lady," Peggy persisted.

"A lady? Old?"

"No. Will you see her?" said Peggy.

"What's she like?"

"Been waiting nearly an hour, that she has."

"What is she like?"

"O, little. Pretty. Deceitful," said Peggy, whose nose was elevated.

"We're all that," sighed Zoë, contemplating her own performances in that line. "I will go in."

Mrs Jewell-Brown was exceedingly pretty, and when she stood, far from tall; so warm in manner was she, also, that Zoë admitted the probability of the deceit. The interview began awkwardly enough.

"You wrote to my husband," was a good beginning, but like the "dear sir" of commerce it suggested little further. Zoë was at a loss for words. She felt kindly disposed towards the diminutive lady, believing her lot to be as unhappily cast as her own. She thought her visitor must be the dupe of her husband at best; more probably a disillusioned wife. Remembering her own unhappy experience of matrimony, she shuddered; Jewell-Brown she knew to have some generous impulses. *He's not, at any rate, all bad,* she reflected. But she considered what evil she knew of him to be sufficiently damning to warrant a feeling of fellowship for his wife.

"He was very glad to have your letter," Mrs Jewell-Brown went on, "I hope you'll—well, I'd better be just as frank as—anyhow, you must stop me if I should——?"

"Pray be candid with me," Zoë begged. "This is a matter for directness, I think. The facts are known to you, no doubt."

"My dear Mrs Wychthwaite, most sad!" cried the

visitor. "Herbert and I talked it over togeth—you *don't* mind my knowing I hope? A woman, you know?"

"I feel that Mr Jewell-Brown has done very wisely," Zoë commented.

The discourse that followed was listened to earnestly by her, but it left her unmoved. Taking for her text the great forces of Time and Patience (with occasional references to duty and *The Thing*, a mystic element which most of Zoë's actions seemed not to have been), the little lady held forth at some length, but with amazing incoherency. She worked herself up by her own eloquence to a height of sincerity that carried Zoë along from time to time, out of gratitude to the little creature, who seemed genuinely anxious to adjust the painful affair. Friendship for Wychthwaite and sympathy for his wife, she declared to be her motives. Zoë began to be desperately hopeful that something might be arranged before she sank from this high pitch of potential virtue. By excluding all memory of Wychthwaite's sin and figuring to herself his personality when he was the wooer she was able to follow the snatches of argument quoted in turn by her visitor, without enthusiasm, it is true, but also certainly without repulsion.

Moral right, one reason ran, demanded her return. The words of the Doctor and Brother Frederic on that tragic morn years ago, from which this interview arose, returned to her with full force: the sight of Law and Religion rising in unassailed majesty above the town to illustrate their meaning: she remembered and was moved. Memory would not conveniently stay at that,

backward and forward, shuttlewise, it went, bearing her with it: she recalled the look of the swinish husband, she was carried through the suite of that morning: pain and disgust were made clear to her as though they were new. Mentally she was torn asunder. She hearkened to the pattering eloquence of Mrs Jewell-Brown, and made an effort to comprehend: she battled furiously: purity differed from what was right. To be pure, she must sin: to do right, she must sacrifice her cleanness.

The course of the various arguments, many of them, by chance, sound, brought them to a point where nothing was proven, but friendship became possible. The tone was noticeably warmer; greater concessions were made in both minds; an adjustment seemed highly probable. It was the unfortunate fate of Zoë that events should happen as she had half-heartedly intended. She found herself weakly doing what she believed to be right and hoping ardently that something would interfere to prevent its completion. The many conventions insisted on repeatedly by Mrs Jewell-Brown began, by reason of their frequency, to appear just and proper: equity seemed incarnate in the person of the dainty little woman. Zoë thought her experience enormous, her impartiality miraculous. She credited Mr Jewell-Brown with great sense in sending his wife.

Yet she confided nothing in the creature, no admissions were made, although leading questions were put and every underhand attempt was made to extract information. What filled Zoë's heart and mind never would be spoken. She might, if fervour urged, in a moment of great abandonment, whisper in a confessor's ear the

very thoughts that were of themselves a sin: but she was cold at heart; none but human aid would she seek, and to human creature she would not show her soul.

The chatter brought more clearly the idea of "arrangement" to view: the bugbear she so openly sought. Suggestions were wide-cast, notions were lavishly evoked. The end of the interview loomed in sight, and for that reason, Mrs Jewell-Brown dared to become very familiar.

"My dearest Mrs Wychthwaite," she said, "I'm so glad you're beginning to realise—to see that you owe—you are going, I am sure, to *try*—now, will you? Will you come to us for a while? To *us*, you know. And of course, see plenty of—well, fun, life, all that: Mr Wychthwaite's set. We'd go—go to Paris. What do you think? Do you know——? You don't? It will be lovely for you."

Zoë was exceedingly patient; understanding loomed through.

"I don't know about leaving the town," she demurred, "I only want to try, to make sure of my mind before I decide to return to him."

"Oh, you must leave the town," cried Mrs Jewell-Brown. "You don't think enough about appearances. That is what really *counts*. It pays to think of how it looks. Living apart like this, it's not the Thing."

"You are very good," said Zoë, vaguely. "I should like to do what is best."

"You see, you might be—you are doubted," said Mrs Jewell-Brown.

"Doubted!" Zoë took up. "By whom?"

"By everyone, by your husband, by your friends, by your audience, your public. You are in a high position, you are well known."

"By my friends, never," said Zoë, quietly. "Friendship is trust. Those I honour respect me because I can honestly respect myself. In that I am at peace."

"Oh, I wouldn't for worlds——!" cried Mrs Jewell-Brown. "You quite misunderstand—How can you think—I don't want to say anything that may wound you. But I wish you would come to me," she added a moment later inconsequentially.

Zoë went to the tiny balcony for a moment's thought: she stood on it in full view of the street. Burmance, slowly parading below with his eyes fixed on that point, was at length rewarded: his day was well spent. Zoë met his glance, they bowed, he paused, but she made no further sign. He strode slowly away, rejoiced at his sight. Zoë went in.

"Thank you, I will come," she said, with a grave face. "It *is* for the best. I will strive to like my husband. He will come with us to Paris?"

"Of course," cried Mrs Jewell-Brown. Her cheeks were crimson: it meant Paris for her, it meant new robes for her, pleasures without end for her, and it meant also Wychthwaite for her. She clapped her hands, girlishly. "Paris!" she cried.

Zoë's conscience had been rendered doubly active, although she would not for the wealth of Golconda have admitted it, by the subtle belief that she *was* in a position to be doubted, a belief born of the incident that led to the sending of Mr Jewell-Brown's letter, and grown mature at the lady's words. Night had brought her

such rigorous self-examination: she accepted this cruel suggestion without further comment: she dared not let day's garish light into the chambers of her soul. There was no foundation in Mrs Jewell-Brown's expression. Her sole enemy at the theatre had, it is true, "doubted"; she ignored him wisely, he was built awry, honour was unknown to him. Her public was uniquely loyal, her action with regard to Wychthwaite had won attention for her, her straightforward life since that date had gained and kept respect. Where none assailed, few surely could doubt: belittlement of her virtue in men's minds would not stay at the mental process. She could not have lived so unattacked in a general atmosphere of degrading opinion. But her mind was tinder to the spark of Kitty Jewell-Brown's inchoate objection: it was immediately fired. The sight of the greatly desired at another moment might have led her to answer very differently; at that crucial point, it served to illustrate what she was pleased to consider her danger. The word, mentally expressed, was enough to set her in a state of trepidancy. She held the night's struggle as nothing, its duration insignificant, the decision arising from it trivially obtained; in this new perspective, her "danger" was exaggerated. She shrank from it in alarm.

Burmance went on, and the answer was given. Incredibly swiftly all was arranged for Zoë's sojourn abroad: it was clear that the matter had all been made ready before her consent was gained. Once the word had been given, Zoë was no longer a free agent: not even an instrument: a chattel was the term. When Mrs Jewell-Brown went away, the very time of the train was settled.

Zoë, left to herself, reflected on the business-like character of the affair with complacency, fondly believing herself to be responsible for the sensible and calm fashion in which the conversation had been conducted. She set busily about preparations, deeming it sager not to reflect in other directions. Her wardrobe was inspected, she made notes of what she should need. On subsequent journeyings through the sitting room, the slip of paper bearing the hour of the train began to annoy her. She was ready to weep. The Campobossis came in. Tedious was the explanation that had to follow; they listened, approved, and wisely left her alone. She had the flat to herself again. An interview with her manager took place in the evening: Zoë deplored his complaisance, he admitted her right to a holiday: unbaulked yet baffled she returned to another sleepless night. As during its forerunner again she tossed, wept again; more than once she lit her candle to see if the paper were really by her side, marked with the hour of the train: at each undesired reassurance she sank back in the restored darkness, heavy at heart.

When morning had calmed her anew, she wrote to Burmance, in the most abstractly friendly vein: she stated her plans, and, while begging him to forget her behaviour of such and such a day (when she had been mistaken with respect to a feeling she had believed in at the time, but, later, discovered to be non-existent), she assured him she was always his sincere friend. Rather too abstract and too friendly the letter must have been: Burmance read it for what it was worth and forthwith flung it on the fire. Insincerity was black

in every scratch of it and he was rejoiced to see it. The letter he sent in reply ignored the tone and accepted the information patiently; he begged for her address, and in a burst of passionate love-making at the end gave her to understand that she was his already, in spite of all the mediators in the world, aye, and all the husbands. He feared nothing from the visit, and did not scruple to tell her so. Magnificent trust in her love for him was his: far more than the eloquence of Kitty it bore Zoë along. She penned another note in warmer vein to give him her future address, but she was firm to set his term of probation until a late day. That he was so confident of her decision at the expiration of that time was a secret delight to her. Here was a lover knowing his mistress's heart better than she knew it herself, daring to express the passion that burned in her, whereas she feared to give it speech. His last letter exceeded the former one in love: it set Zoë's heart fluttering; alas for human opportunities! Had he boldly stepped in that day she would have run tremblingly into his arms and never left them. Duty, undesirable mentor, stood before them. They peeped round its ugly shape, each eyeing the lovely vista beyond, and were afraid to pass it.

Zoë held her letter to the candle, but withdrew it, scorched at the edge: it was not meant for incineration; its lot was a happier one, hid in her bosom, where the touch of it gave her peace. It bade her come to him, and she meant to obey it. He agreed to the term she had decided upon, and told her that if she had made no sign before twelve midnight of that day, he should go away, definitely and for ever go away. He left her

no choice : she asked for none. She meant to go, as surely as he expected her.

Meanwhile it pleased her to make an apparent effort to come to some arrangement with the lawful spouse. With Burmance's written passion at her heart, she faced the dangers of the experiment unflinchingly.

Chapter XXXIV

takes all a-journeying

THE sight of the train unnerved Zoë, who had never travelled in one. Furtively she stretched a hand to Peggy; the woman took it gladly, and together they clung, unobserved, watching the monster of engineering as it steamed quietly along the platform. Peggy recalled, mentally, sundry amazing illusions of the days of insobriety, into which this abominable construction might more fitly have entered than into the delicate departure of a lady. She was thankful of her lady's hand held tightly under their twin shawls.

Zoë was bidden mount: Peggy helped her and then began deliberately to climb herself,

"Oh, your servant doesn't come!" cried Mrs Jewell-Brown.

"Yes," Zoë declared, full of dismay. Wychthwaite repulsed the ascending Peggy.

"No, no, we can get you a natty girl in Paris."

"Come in, Peggy," said Zoë.

"No, Mr Wychthwaite is right," she was told. "You shall have a new maid later on."

"What!" cried Zoë. "Am I not to have Peggy?"

"I think it's wiser not," said Mrs Jewell-Brown.

"Certainly not," said Wychthwaite.

Amid the jeers of the vulgar, Peggy was dislodged and firmly handed down. Zoë stared blankly: consternation overcame her at the idea of losing her only friend: she could not bear to contemplate the starting of the train, taking her away with these people whom she feared and the husband she abhorred. The sight of Peggy, looking not unlike a penguin on the platform, divided from her, illustrated her helplessness. She sprang out recklessly. Wychthwaite followed.

"I won't go," cried Zoë. "I will not!"

"Nonsense, you shall!" he affirmed, and seized her arm: she struggled.

"Hurt me," she said, "and I'll have all the town about me in a minute!" Peggy added to the picturesque effect of this apparent abduction by clasping her lady full round the waist and standing like a rock. Kitty in the carriage, biting her lip, could have wept for vexation. She cried to Zoë not to be silly, not to be so silly, to try not to be so silly. The tableau persisted until Jewell-Brown thought fit to come along that way. He was strolling easily when the marvellous group caught his eye: it quickened his pace. Zoë felt sure of his chivalry.

"They say I'm to come without my servant," she cried, desperately. "I can't!"

"Of course not," he said cheerfully. "You shall take her. I understood that. In you all get!" He helped Peggy himself, standing bravely below while she clambered breathlessly into the compartment that held her lady; she was wedged in beside Zoë; polygonal parcels were tucked in here and there to keep

the party from displacement when the train should attain speed, and they were off.

The hours were very long in the carriage. Kitty grumbled, scented her handkerchief, used smelling-salts, fanned herself, tried to doze. Wychthwaite stared at the three women in turn, his gaze resting longest on Zoë. Peggy snored, volcanically: she presented her least prepossessing appearance to the occasional stare of Wychthwaite. Words reminiscent of past struggles with her ecclesiastical relation escaped her in slumber. When she woke, she glowered at the hasty landscapes, angry to be, by them, reminded of the day when she had travelled, expeditiously and in undignified pose, through the cloisters of the Fraternity. This panorama of hills, fields and towns was not unlike the fleeting vision which marked that memorable exit. Dozing or awake, she preferred to close her eyes.

Zoë felt no inclination to rest. All was new to her. She and Mr Jewell-Brown talked; ere long they had become quite friendly; he pointed out amusing sights as they went along; she was the only one who chose to be amused. Reserve became tedious, she held on to it awhile grudgingly, and at last allowed it to slip altogether. Resolutely she had put the image of Burmance from her: at its frequent return she would not look upon it. Now in the hurly-burly of the train and the gaiety of Jewell-Brown's chatter, she found relief from its bitter sweetness. While she laughed and talked, the memory of her lover was completely effaced. Jewell-Brown began to tease Zoë about her accent: she retaliated by mocking his halting French.

She found in him the rollicking good nature of Joseph, not deep or thoughtful, but "great fun."

"Everything is so new!" she cried in delight, as the country revealed the dignity of its landscapes before her eyes.

"It's you who are so new," Jewell-Brown assured her. "This kind of thing, I can vouch for, is very very old."

Occasionally Kitty threw in a peevish word; her irritation affected Zoë not at all. At the passing of a little village, artistically complete, steeple, mill, parsonage, white ribbon of road and all, snugly set into a frame of tilth, she clapped her hands and laughed.

"Lovely, lovely," she cried, joyously. "Can there be places so pretty?"

"English villages are prettier, to my mind," Jewell Brown rejoined. "But you don't know England. Why, what a lot you've got to learn! Travel in the country there, on horseback for preference: you turn a corner, and see the red homesteads embedded in fields. And the fields too, have a gentler inclination: the swell about the hills: no sudden scarps, and also none of these flat arid acres. All is gently undulating, like a sea."

"Prettier than this," Zoë demurred.

"By far," he insisted, "by far. You must see England in the Spring. Hawthorns budding to their own scent: pollen flying from the firs: birds all one sweet voice: the grass begemmed in loveliness of flowers. What better habitation for love in the Spring?"

The word recalled the lover; Zoë smiled and sighed. Silence fell; Kitty threw a contemptuous glance at her husband: he flushed painfully. Long past were his days of rhapsody. Kitty could not bear to hear "nonsense" talked. Wychthwaite frowned tentatively, wishing he could command his lady's attention as readily as Jewell-Brown seemed to do. Zoë perceived the calm, she roused herself and strove to regain her earlier tone of raillery. The two were all laughter again; Kitty still curled her lip, Wychthwaite mused.

He stared at her: his old infatuation was far from being abated. This new spectacle of her, bright, enthusiastic, dimpling into smiles at a word, inflamed him. No less did her sudden gravity and seriousness, when the laughter was done. He was the lover at heart; her brilliancy was new to him, he had not known her frivolous; the revelation was a fillip to him. His long admiring wondering stare became fixed. Zoë caught his eye, and was forcibly reminded of his fatuous look on their miserable wedding night. Kitty saw their looks meet and feared that an understanding might result: she grumbled and fidgeted, her hopes low. She felt irritated, and chafed at being secondarily considered.

The day drew on; the party lunched in the carriage, at a convenient hour. Zoë and Jewell-Brown shared a serviette across their knees: Wychthwaite was obliged to serve Kitty: while she brightened, he sulked. The meal finished, they dosed and chatted again.

"What a thing travel is!" Peggy cried, lifting her sleepy lady out. "I've seen more cows to-day than in all my life before."

Paris could not equal this. They yawned themselves in silence to the hotel.

Chapter XXXV

brings in the lover and sends him off again

PARIS produced its fairest weather for the stranger within its gates. Under cloudless skies, Zoë traversed the wonderful avenues and parks, watching the traffic of the streets, and the gliding pageant of the river.

Kitty Jewell-Brown's Paris was a social one; visits and drives in company made up its days, varied by incursions into shops, where hours might be spent, profitably for the mercer. Frills and furbelows appealed to Zoë: it took some time to tire her of these shopping expeditions, but at last she did grow weary. Kitty, with the energy that replaced sense in her, could have sat for ever watching the shop-girls parade, and without tiring, have daily communings with sleek men behind the counters. To Zoë the sight of mincing damsels, in borrowed attire, recalled the statelier mien of Lalage, in that occupation. She would sit at Kitty's side, ejaculating at need her admiration of the costumes displayed, while at heart the dread depression that had once assailed her weighed her down.

Kitty was capricious, but not so in the worst degree. A long time pondering, and not easily pleased, she certainly was, but Zoë was spared the disgrace of leaving a shop after several hours' sojourn, without having bought the worth of a half-penny. On the contrary, lavish expenditure was Mrs Jewell-Brown's

pleasure every day. Zoë bought when she needed, Kitty bought as long as she had the money.

It was a principle of Kitty's social code never to go twice to the same house in the same head-gear. Zoë had two bonnets, an every day one and a best; she was obliged to buy more. She sighed at the expenditure that Kitty indulged in, nearly wept at this new outlay.

After wearying days of this kind the evenings were no more restful: parties of whist, music, conversation, literature, games, dinner succeeded each other. The life was entirely new to Zoë, for a while she sipped its sweets with joy. She lived in an atmosphere of best clothes: if they were not engaged at a friend's they expected company at home. She would have gladly enough spent her evenings in this fashion, if the days had been her own. She pleaded for change of the mornings in vain: Kitty knew of no other occupation; she met Zoë's protest with a stare and a shrug. Zoë suggested visiting picture galleries. Good-naturedly enough, Mrs Jewell-Brown drove her the next day to the Louvre, entered with her; at the end of fifteen minutes, she made it clear that her duty was at an end. There was nothing to see in the Louvre.

Zoë rebelled, a second day she went on foot. Wychthwaite offered to accompany her. She accepted him, and tired him out. An hour of martyred saints and demigods, minus skin, tongue or limbs, sickened him. He lolled about, beat his foot with his cane, yawned surreptitiously and reflected what a deuced blood-thirsty lot the chaps of old used to be. He had no liking for pictures, and said so. He loved Zoë in

his fashion, but was not allowed to say that. In the quieter rooms, which Kitty had in horror eschewed, he ventured on tender speeches; Zoë met them civilly, so much so that they died of inanition.

The third morning of her quest of art discovered Peggy to be her attendant. With that solid bulwark to support her, she spent her mornings in the great galleries before the great pictures, greatly bored. Every one was at ease: Zoë was alone; Kitty was free to run from milliner to milliner; Wychthwaite had done his duty; Jewell-Brown had no immediate interest; Peggy was overjoyed to be in constant company of her dear lady. Paris now became to the servant a place of real interest, not a city of painted dames, gallant loafers and supercilious servants. She sat in stout vigilance while Zoë, her thoughts elsewhere, stepped from picture to picture, or sank in abstraction before some canvas. Art did not appeal to Peggy; descents from the Cross and Holy Families evoked prayers and crossings: she wondered why on earth the rooms were not furnished. She gazed for the most part at the attendants whom she took for soldiers out of employment, or eyed warily the males that circulated in the same rooms. Never a wink of sleep did she take, although Nature cried for it. No man approached her lady without her angry stare upon him. Innocent students, harmless foreigners and idle strollers caught the warning eye before they had observed the young lady whom perhaps they elbowed: more than one was disconcerted on those occasions without an idea of his crime. Vigilance unwinking she conceived to be her duty. Zoë remained therefore unattacked and also ignorant of the glare that encom-

passed her. Her peace was intense; Peggy, only to observe it, was herself rejoiced. Freed from the duties of civility, attention and enthusiasm, which being with Mrs Jewell-Brown had necessitated, she had opportunities for reflection and repose. During this process she considered the *pros* and *cons* of Wychthwaite's case; earnestly and diligently did she try to keep his good points before her; another's intervened always; where she should have admired the husband, she wandered and adored the lover. The pleasant vision displaced the other always. She was honest in her efforts, but she greatly rejoiced to find them vain. The pictures were all of Burmance, unless, cruel memory triumphing, the sight of Wychthwaite on her wedding night arose framed in heavy gold before her on the walls. She sighed blissfully from time to time, recalling with zest her loneliness. She loved to be solitary.

There were more reasons than one for her desire to be apart from her hostess. The discovery came soon that the men were not the only delinquents from severe virtue in that household. Careless, lively, and gallant beyond reason Jewell-Brown most certainly was, combining the prankishness of a boy of eighteen with the elegancies of a man of forty. Idleness was his besetting sin; nothing mattered to his indolence: he was soft clay in the hands of whomsoever chose to mould him. Evil had been his earliest teaching, and profiting by it with the support of his unstable companions he made a very good imitation of a bold, bad man. Had his boyhood been spent among virtuous and serious souls, he would have become as fair a semblance of a valued member of society. There was no greatness in him,

but his mediocrity saved him from being really harmful. Indolently he lived the life his fellows indicated: love, hate, despair, all of the deep passions were unknown to him. The Devil himself would have passed him over with a shrug as stony ground. Zoë found him an ally; she formed no idea of his real character; she believed him to be a piratical pursuer of dames and hoped to reform him. What was admirable in him found an admirer in her. There was little else to admire in the whole party but his genuine good nature, his constant cheerfulness, his willingness to be commanded. The club was his headquarters. Zoë met him rarely alone, but whenever they did meet, real friendliness made their chatter pleasant to her. They touched on nothing profound; he would have been drowned beyond all hope had they done so. Shallowly they talked of ephemeral subjects, but always gaily and always without rancour, Zoë was appalled to discover that he "believed in nothing."

"Why," she cried, "that's worse than being a Protestant."

"What do you believe?" he inquired.

She hesitated to speak devoutly, fearing ridicule. He was kind and serious: she ventured timidly to invite him to attend public worship with her. He saw her earnestness and accompanied her to church.

"Do you believe all that?" he asked on their way home. "Really, truly, do you? Come now, do you?"

"Certainly I do," Zoë said. "And you should also," she added tentatively later.

"Oh, I don't stand a dog's chance," he averred.

"It's my belief I'd bleed black if you ran a knife in my heart."

Her success with him enheartened her. She was bold to suggest attendance at mass to Wychthwaite. She was met with uproarious mirth. The tone of civil friendliness that her husband for the most part affected was dropped. She went away abashed, preferring Mr Jewell-Brown's shallowness and disbelief.

Kitty she dared not ask: ignorant and debased the husband might be, but the wife was worse: she was impure in thought and word. It could not be said that she offended by actual pruriency of mind, but from living always for herself and looking in her otiose fashion from the outside of things, she had adopted ideas that were not wholesome. Her conversation was neither bright nor clean, in general; she was not held to transgress by the use of words or expressions because her associates were all of the same mind. They eyed the broad truths of life from a corner, seeing all in a distorted perspective. Virtue was, in Kitty's sincere belief, a show; to be wholly virtuous was to be exceedingly careful. Truth was unknown in the circle within which she moved: honour nothing but a name to be often invoked and oftener disregarded: righteousness but another word for cant: all that was pure and holy and good to be scoffed at and derided.

If Jewell-Brown felt amused at the ceremonial in the churches whither our devout lady led him, he had the distinct grace to mock neither at the time nor later. Kitty and Wychthwaite, awaiting entertainment, were sadly undone: they chose to believe he had not been to church. The fun had failed them: by his abstention

from raillery Jewell-Brown had saved himself from a taunt that might have clung for ever. His wife and Wychthwaite would have delighted to spread the story. "Been to church again?" would have become a catch-word, by constant misuse and iteration considered at last to be wit. All this he was spared.

The wife, to console herself for the lack of this humorous sally, ran to and fro in the shops, happier since Zoë had left the tedious process of gazing at silks to pursue the deadly occupation of staring at canvases; her attendant now was Wychthwaite, willing enough to sit by and become enthusiastic when stuffs were unrolled before his eyes. The previous procedure had been little drive, much shop; this was reversed, much drive, little shop was the order, and the intervals, spent tête-à-tête in Kitty's elegant victoria, were pleasing to both. Wychthwaite knew Kitty to be worthless: he cared for her as little as for a butterfly; but she amused, she occupied him, she could be very charming to a man. There were little tricks of hers that pleased: when a bright gown was displayed, she would seize her companion's hand in joy; when a foolish thing was said by a friend at the carriage side, her foot would steal to Wychthwaite's and gently tread on his. Side-glances were a strong point with her, she drove them in at every possible moment. At evening she would ask if Zoë were not yet tired of the stuffy old pictures, gladly laughing when assured that they still pleased. Every day that Zoë chose to wander alone meant for Kitty a further time in Wychthwaite's society.

A morning in the dreariest and stuffiest of galleries was drawing to a close. Zoë looked at her watch, took

her first comprehensive look at the old masters and signalled to Peggy to follow. The good woman refused to see. Zoë made her way to the centre of the room, where solemnly enthroned on crimson velvet, Peggy had sat; like a dog that chooses to be naughty, Peggy marched off in the opposite direction, Zoë pursued; Peggy lumbered on. Zoë could proceed no further; her way was blocked by a gentleman into whom she had run full tilt, too intent on securing her servant to take account of intermediate bodies. Now raising her eyes to his face in apology, she saw Burmance. Hours before the pictures had been occupied with his image, with the reality before her she did not believe her eyes.

"I have startled you, I am afraid," he said. "I'd watched you so long, forgetting you had not seen me."

"You are real then?" Zoë said.

"Quite real. Can I have my answer, Zoë?"

She brushed her cheek with her fingers in meditation, looking at him. With her glance in his, she was ready to go to him at once; her conscience pricked her unmercifully when she averted her eyes; it had been sorely exercised by frequent churchgoing.

"You are come too soon," she said.

"Too soon," he echoed, ruefully.

"For our agreement," she hastened to add. She led the way to Peggy's late seat.

"I beckoned to your woman to go," Burmance said. Zoë loved Peggy for her complaisance. They sat in happy silence, their eyes meeting; a word softly dropped from her lips or his their only talk. Love was rigorously excluded from these infrequent ejaculations, and nothing else was spoken of. Sighing, they had at

last to part, each remembering with a glow the fashion of their last good-bye. She looked away; he proved his strength by gazing at her while he held her hand, but he had little to say; she got her hand away quite crushed by the loving pressure of his fingers.

"Until the fifteenth," was her word. It made him triumphant.

"If then, why not now, my Zoë?" he cried. She shook her head.

"You must go away till then," she said. "Go to the country."

He left her in Peggy's charge and went to Fontainebleau, where he stayed for one day. Paris held his lodestone, he could not rove among the trees.

Zoë was weary to death of the desolate martyrs. She returned, unwelcomed, to Kitty's side. Again she suffered the silly monotony of her occupations; again shops, dressmakers, drives and expenditure filled her days. The frivolity of such an existence had much to recommend it. Zoë could not think of Burmance: the empty business of pleasure entirely occupied her mind, she was often with Wychthwaite, she had perforce to consider him. He had become Kitty's tame cat. Rumour gave him another title. He submitted to her bullyings and pettings without rebellion. Zoë, not apt at perceiving sin, was amazed to note the licence with which he and Kitty addressed each other: they had a variety of phrases and expressions which conveyed nothing to her mind, much to theirs: they conversed, as it were, in a cypher, to which she was not privy. She began to understand the danger of Kitty's lightness, the evil of Wychthwaite's complaisance. They

excluded her frankly from much of their chatter, she was made to feel that she was one too many. Bravely she endured, for Jewell-Brown's sake. In the victoria Wychthwaite faced Kitty, and Zoë became aware that their feet signalled when lips were silent. She was hot with disgust; cold, the moment after, with apprehension.

Wychthwaite's advances to herself had ceased. He had not cared to woo a statue, when Kitty was by. His earlier respectful advances, easily repulsed, had almost entirely ceased, he sued no more for reinstatement. Zoë for her part unbent no more to him. The constant companionship had failed of its effect: seeing him daily in the hideousness of his behaviour with Kitty, Zoë grew afraid and wary. At heart she was glad to know him evil, no possibility of arrangement suggested itself to her.

She became aware, with a certain pride, that if her choice lay between living with him and death, self-murder should be her lot. Her own strength, thus revealed to her, amazed her; she reflected, saw in this manifestation of will the greater force of her lover and was content. She recognised clearly now that Kitty's sedatives, Time and Patience, were not intended to make matters better: it was evident that in bringing Zoë to Paris, Mrs Jewell-Brown had thought only of herself. Time and Patience she had preached; Time, Zoë feared, might make the affair more serious; Patience she believed to be a sin against her own purity.

The behaviour Wychthwaite had affected at the beginning of her stay had changed noticeably. He

lacked respect, grew familiar, disregarded her presence as often as not, Zoë double-locked her already barricaded heart and endured. The secret conversation the two had indulged in when she was present had startled her and made her suspicious: they grew bold, cypher was not used, Wychthwaite spoke freely, Kitty vulgarly: an air of understanding each other very well was clear to the keen observer. Zoë grew timid as their courage increased: she believed, doubted, was at a loss. So little of life did she know, so much of girlish frolic made up her experience, that she could not measure the extent of the iniquity daily before her eyes. The tone of its not over-delicate raillery which they adopted on excursions was dropped in Jewell-Brown's hearing. He yawned himself away to his club for the most part. The door would hardly have closed on him before one or other would express some coarseness. Zoë blushed often, more frequently grew cold at heart at their talk. Their society was hard to bear. She looked wistfully at Jewell-Brown, desiring his presence; he went away unobservant. When he sat at table with them or went abroad in their company, she could be gay; he was her safeguard, since the day she had won him by her "egregious impudence."

For his part, he respected her: she was sweet and fresh in tone and thought: the novelty of such a woman made him notice her. He thought she would be beastly dull if she weren't so deuced handsome. He held her in more regard than his wife, whose nature he vaguely understood, though ignoring her actual frailties. He gave Zoë a kind thought from time to time, when he passed the carriage in town, or left

her with the festive twain. He thought she would have made a kind little sister.

Zoë could endure no more. She left the two to their own devices: they applauded her going, not so quietly but that she heard. She retired to the honest company of Peggy. That good creature sat for the most part "high and dry," so she termed it, above the tide of Parisian putrescence: with her hands occupied in knitting, while a complaisant housemaid read aloud to her, she suffered the life of the town to pass unnoticed. The housemaid, for her part, was of an age and a mind wherein tales of adventure are of little worth: she must read, if read she must, stories of love; dukes ran off with pretty governesses; great financiers ruined beautiful concert-singers; bold bad men forced their way into the apartments of the highest ladies imaginable, who in no wise said them nay. Peggy listened with a tight mouth, her eyes intent on her needles. Reading in other days had meant to her the slow delivery of pious books, growled out by Madame Plisse, or at the worst, tales of plain, unvarnished respectability. Paris, it was obvious, could not produce anything but the most unspeakable.

The housemaid was plump and personable. She could toss her head with the best, and as for the flouncings-about she indulged in when dusting, queens could scarcely have bettered them. She had formed her own opinion concerning the matrimonial difficulties of the household. One afternoon she slapped the book together and gave her opinion frankly. Peggy sat staring, helpless for the moment. Here was the

first awakening to the unpleasantness of her surroundings. The girl chattered gaily, she admired both her master and Wychthwaite, preferring the latter. She had shrewdly divined that he was the stronger man: she knew also that he had begun a flirtation with Kitty of very idleness—she was, the housemaid said, a common coquette—but that the situation had the elements of more than flirtation in it now. It appeared that the servants, in the Court of the Kitchen, judged, condemned and were constantly facetious about them.

Peggy heard all and was still listening when Zoë rang.

"I'll stay in this afternoon, Peggy," she said.

"I should," said Peggy.

"I'll change my dress," she said further, and as Peggy helped her to put on her house dress, she held a miserable silence. Seated with Peggy putting away the walking dress she tried to talk, but Peggy was surly. The effect of her knowledge was to make her angry and frightened.

"We'll not be here much longer, my Miss?" she inquired.

Zoë blushed, wondering if she knew. "And why not, Peggy?"

"I don't like the place," Peggy cried. "I hate it. And the folk."

"Not very long," Zoë said. She dismissed the woman and counted on her fingers the hours that stretched between her and Burmance. The number depressed her: he was so long away, and she had made it so.

Glad of her solitude, she wrote a number of letters, one to Wychthwaite, another to Jewell-Brown, another to Peggy, enclosing money. These she locked away securely until the fifteenth, the day that should set her free. The business brightened her, she could sing for happiness. She fell into a train of pleasant thoughts of her lover: to distract herself, she went down to the drawing-room whence Wychthwaite and Kitty had long gone, to read and play.

Chapter XXXVI

tells of Jewell-Brown's awakening, and shows that a man may be a knave and a fool and yet be worthy of redemption

WHISPERS ran about the Club that Jewell-Brown frequented, dying away at his approach. Inadvertently he heard voices coupling his wife's name with that of Wychthwaite: vulgar innuendo accompanied the speech; he realised in a moment that the matter was new to none of the ears that heard it, save his. He left the billiard-table to follow the gossips into the hall of the Club. Furiously he demanded an explanation: there was a scene, the men who had talked had not known he was present: everyone stared awkwardly at his fellow, none answered Jewell-Brown. He stood, without his coat, the centre of an almost silent group: Jewell-Brown was drawn into a room. His fury made him stammer, he beat his hands together in the manner of the impatient. There was no way out of it, at length one fellow apologetically told him, with the echoed assurance that it was all idle chatter and bosh and not worth listening to. He would have said more in the same strain, his companions agreeing, but that Jewell-Brown made to start away, coatless, toward his home. He was detained for a short space, until he could be calmer. The man who had told him went with him.

Kitty and her cavalier were not in the house: nor for all he could see, was Zoë.

"She's with them, you fool!" he cried; "that good little thing has saved my name."

"I don't see—" the man began.

"Wychthwaite's wife," said Jewell-Brown. "What a pack of fools those tattling gossips are! She's always with 'em." He was moved to mirth, apparently at his companion's expense.

He sat down to give himself time for thought. Quiet reflection brought with it the conviction of Wychthwaite's honour, his passion for Zoë, which, unallayed, he argued, must needs persist. The man went away, mystified, not in the least convinced, Jewell-Brown quietly awaited their return.

He felt complete reliance on Wychthwaite's honour not a thought, be it noted, of the honour of his wife. It was not she that he trusted, but her friends. He rang at last for tea. It was brought, and Zoë came at the same moment into the room. She was somewhat surprised to find her host alone, more to note his evident dismay.

"Back already?" he said, in answer to her salutation.

"I've not been out," she replied.

"All stopped in, hey?" he went on.

"The others are out just now," she said, feeling her way. "Do you want Kitty? I know where she is." She did not, but the statement passed unchallenged.

He looked awkwardly about, his fears returning.

"Why didn't you go too, Zoë?" he asked.

"I had a headache," she said. "I thought I should

be better resting. I ought not to have missed my outing.'"

"I'm afraid you often miss your outing, as you call it," he said, gravely. Zoë shook her head.

"Oh, no! I would if I could, I'm afraid—I'm so lazy lately—but your wife is energy inexhaustible; she's always about, I don't get any rest."

During the progress of her speech he brightened; at the end, he sighed; not so easily might his doubts be dissipated. Zoë gave him tea, he left it untouched; she tried to make him talk, he stared, listened, forgot to answer, fidgeted, fell into abstraction. At last he rose to go out again.

"Billiards?" said Zoë.

"No more billiards for me," he said.

He went down the steps of the house, stood a while then wandered aimlessly away. Zoë watched him while she might, leaning from the window to see which road he took.

Her head ached desolately, she went to her room to lie down, the effort of trying to amuse and divert him had exhausted her. A dinner party was arranged for the evening; Zoë had to rise, dress herself with Peggy's help, and go down. She entered the room late. Kitty, resplendently clad, received her guests, Wychthwaite entertained them. Jewell-Brown was even later: he he was in a sullen mood, curt with his wife, scarcely amiable with the visitors. Zoë shook off her weariness; murmurs reached her ears about the sulky husband and the laughing other; she threw herself heart and soul into the task of making things go. A new Zoë shone on the pleased company: she was no longer the dull

prude of Kitty's description. She chatted familiarly with all; with the ringing merriment that had often angered Sister Joy, she kept the table gay: she babbled nonsense to the older men, talked earnestly with the young. Wychthwaite received a smile and a jest, Kitty indulged her pout. At one end sat Jewell-Brown, ominously quiet, at the other, his wife, bitterly outdone. Not Kitty alone found Zoë's charm trying. As his wife's pout grew, Jewell-Brown became more cheerful. The evening had begun unpleasantly; it went very little better as the hours passed. Mankind was pleased with Zoë, every fellow at table must needs bandy a jest with her. She forgot her headache in the certain triumph.

Regarding her, not without admiration, Jewell-Brown was bound to think his earlier suspicions ridiculous: it was foolish to imagine that the husband of so glorious a creature should dangle after his silly little Kitty; he decided that Kitty must have tried, with some success, to inveigle Wychthwaite. He trusted his friend. A glance at him confirmed the new aspect. Wychthwaite was metaphorically at Zoë's feet. Kitty was of no account.

Ladies in the drawing-room made it clear to Zoë that her triumph was a matter of sex; she was used to that state of things; she settled by the fire, cogitating quietly until her thralls should join her. In spite of Kitty's well-meant efforts to mix oil and vinegar, a metaphor rendered unusually applicable by reason of the asperity of the ladies, Zoë sat alone and in silence. She studied the fire intently and meditated Jewell-Brown's mood. She felt a distinct fear when she

recalled his dull anger. Her mind was occupied with the question as to which of the suspected she should warn. From this absorption she was aroused by whispers: quiet tones she had heard, normal chatter she had not noticed; a whisper reached her complete. It had reference to herself and Wychthwaite.

"He must have made it worth her while to leave the stage. Paid her a huge sum, no doubt. Just so that he can be with Kitty Jewell-Brown. What a woman she must be, to take money, in such a case! A dancer, my dear, a ballet-girl."

Kitty for her part held louder talk at a different part of the room. Zoë heard all of the whisper, and left her study by the fire to turn to see the ladies who had thus discussed her. The group broke up. The men came in: there was music; light conversation and laughter, songs and piano-solos occupied the remainder of the evening. Zoë approached Kitty as the last guest was seen to leave.

"Kitty," she murmured, "Your husband found me in alone to-day. He was disturbed, agitated. Be careful."

She met Jewell-Brown at the door and stayed to say good-night to him; at the moment she was granted in a mirror the sight of Wychthwaite and Kitty laughing at her. She guessed what vulgar construction his conceit would lead him to put upon her sentence.

She stayed in her room next day, her headache worse. She resolved to give no more help to the foolish—or—it might be—the guilty, by her evasions or her timely presence. A message that she was very ill was sent to Kitty, who did not trouble to come to

her room. A maid returned with compliments, and the hope that Mrs Wychthwaite would ask for anything she wished. At lunch time she struggled to rise.

"I must go down, Peggy," she cried. "I can't be ill in this house. We'll go away, you and I. I daren't let them think I'm really ill."

She was met by such another look from Jewell-Brown as he had given her the day before. He passed her by and shouted to the servant. "You told me Mrs Wychthwaite had gone out with Mrs Jewell-Brown."

The man hesitated. Zoë broke in. "I started," she said, "but my head ached, and I returned. I am to join them later."

Jewell-Brown laughed. They sat at table together, the servant was silent. He passed about the room once or twice setting dishes before them.

"Go out," said Jewell-Brown. "Go out, I say." The man went out. "I don't believe what you say," he went on to Zoë. "Your shielding them. Damn it, I thought *you* were straight, Zoë."

"Oh, hear me," she said. "It's not so bad."

"If it's bad at all, it's damnation," he answered. "You're clean, or were. What I say is, get out of it before you're soiled too." He left her noisily and without farewell; Zoë heard the hall door bang.

Chapter XXXVII

tells of sickness, and evil, and a great sacrifice

ZOË was pitifully agitated. She felt too ill for coherence of thought. She feared that she had helped to wrong her only friend in that house. He had stood by her once the opportunity to repay him had been hers, and she had honestly tried to avail herself of it; her failure had been the worse in that he believed her to have betrayed him. She faced her new knowledge of the man with greater confidence, in spite of her fear. Her belief that his own morality was lax and that he himself would wink at any like lapse in his wife, now for the first time gave place to a truer and healthier understanding. It was evident that he held sin to be as black as ever it appeared to her. He was not contemptuous of the wrong-doers: but he deeply resented the offence. She was comforted to realise that.

From time to time she slept uneasily, fully clothed on her bed. At each awakening, and they were frequent, for her agitated mind would not rest, hopelessly she meditated the situation. Blackness encompassed her; she closed her eyes, but the evil of her thoughts persisted. At length in the midst of a tangle of imaginings, Wychthwaite's dishonour, Kitty's carelessness, Jewell-Brown's anger, Burmance's love, Peggy's faithfulness, she fell asleep unconscious of her position. She woke this time to daylight, in bed. A

strange man stood by, Peggy, looking very tired, at the foot of the bed: Kitty, by the stranger, pale and anxious. A great desire for sleep was upon her; before the doctor had left the room, she had fallen into a sound slumber.

Once more she awoke, to be fed and to sleep once more: from time to time, the room appeared to her, Peggy its occupant. She recognised at intervals the physician, whose cheery presence was a mystery to her, recurring as it seemed to do every half hour. Strange voices called Peggy "Nurse": or a strange woman tended her. She felt, when she was conscious, nothing but a passionate desire for rest; she slept continually and was not satisfied. A great weariness held her: sleep was no refuge from it. In painful heat, she strove to free herself of the wrappings about her; she was restrained by opposing force, yielded and slept. Thirst assailed her: she cried for drink without ceasing: it seemed as if the cup would never reach her lips, or being quaffed could never be filled again; her throat burned: all the moistness seemed to have fled. At her bedside, clear liquids lay in glass as clear: she could not stretch a hand to take them. Visions of Peggy and the other attendants alternated with horrifying dreams; she slept with terror and woke to dread. For hours the comfort of unconsciousness was denied her; sleep held a world of its own, where she must travel hand in hand with horror. Evocations of the absent lover were vain: she was bound about with misery. To close her eyes was to enter that world of dread. She preferred at length the waking to pain and the less vivid troubles of the world of reality. She was in a sorry plight when

Burmance could no longer exorcise the demons at assault.

Long and wearying hours slipped by, bringing varied torments in their train. She lay at their mercy. Peggy, the brave sober Peggy, was often at hand; Zoë was frightened when the room did not hold her faithful attendant. Love lent her wit to know what help was needed. There were others that came and went, but Zoë leaned on Peggy with full trust, as a child may lean on its mother's bosom. With Peggy in her sight she could for a space hold fear at bay. The sight of Kitty had a contrary effect: she recalled difficulties, unsavoury episodes: Zoë was feebly glad to know that she was not there.

At length, calm returned with genuine sleep: she could close her eyes without fear in the pleasant certainty of rest. From the slumber that followed, she gained strength: she began to find her hand powerful enough to move the coverlet: she could lift her arms to Peggy's neck. The day was no longer an offence to her eyes: with a shaft of sunlight in her room, she defied the demons that had fallen upon her with such distastrous success. In the garish beauty of the daylight, she found their very being ridiculous. Thought might be indulged in without terror: she could meditate and be unafraid. When worries obtruded, and coherence fled her, she turned her mind to Burmance: he became her protector; demons had not shunned his image, but mortals were not proof. His face, fondly recollected, dismissed peremptorily the vague trouble that the uneasy remembrance of Wychthwaite had occasioned. She was grateful to his

exorcism; his memory encompassed repose, and repose became her healing. Unaware, on her partial recovery, of how ill she had been, she marvelled at the kind attention paid to her by everybody. Grapes had been sent by one person, flowers bore the name of another: a plate full of cards with civil messages, that had been left, some of them with gifts, betrayed the real kindness of some of the Jewell-Browns' friends. Had Zoë been perfectly well she would have felt emotion at the display of so much good feeling. Feeble as she was, she wept long and happily: a general grateful message was sent to all.

"Will you see anybody?" Peggy asked.

"You mean——"

"Mr Wychthwaite and Mr Jewell-Brown."

"Both, yes. Not alone: both, you understand."

The visit cheered her; they stayed three minutes, Kitty, gay and frivolous, deprecating the worry that Zoë apologised for having caused. Wychthwaite hardly spoke, Jewell-Brown was cheerful. Wychthwaite was reflecting what a guy his wife looked, white and skinny. Zoë was better for the visit, she asked them to come again. They returned the following day, Wychthwaite savouring fully the disgust that Zoë's pallor and thinness provided for his æsthetic taste. Kitty got no farther than insincere protestations, Jewell-Brown jested, rather boisterously indeed, but the invalid was grateful. She accepted his slight vulgarity as she had accepted the evident vulgarity of the theatre, at its worth: what was sociable, good and helpful, was, in her mind, not destroyed by it. She brightened to see his face all smiles: his most feeble wit, in the

sickroom, appeared highly amusing: she did not ask for brilliancy, the clown of a circus would have diverted her. She found herself answering Jewell-Brown's puny jests with jokes as feeble. They laughed at each other and themselves gaily. His mere putting his hand round the door to wave a facetious "au revoir" made Zoë chuckle with delight for five minutes. The attention pleased her, but tired her also.

When Kitty brought Jewell-Brown again it was without the company of Wychthwaite. Zoë marked the absence of her husband and rejoiced in it. But Jewell-Brown brought the gloom, he began to speak, lost the thread of his remark, glanced at his wife's scornful smile, and made no further effort.

"I have been able to sleep so soundly," Zoë said, to fill the pause, "that I feel perfectly strong. I am a giant. I am Samsonesque. When I could not sleep, I lost all hope. I had such appalling dreams too."

"Dreams," Kitty repeated, idly.

"Oh, I have dreamt horrors. I dare not remember some. They were ghastly. You can't think."

Jewell-Brown caught her eye vaguely.

"Eh?" he ejaculated.

"I said you can't think," Zoë obligingly repeated, not strong enough to go over all of her speech. His answer was surprising.

"No, I can't think," he retorted, with violence, "but by God, I *can* feel."

Zoë had wit enough to perceive that the anger of the interpolation arose not out of her remark, but was the remnant of some conjugal difference earlier in the day. She was silent, nonplussed, and the two left her. The

incident seemed to throw her back among her painful doubts. Peggy was questioned, not vainly. She could inform her lady that the married people were at loggerheads. She did not say that Wychthwaite was the willing cause of dissensions: Zoë knew that only too well. She cried out in her soul against his infamy. Let him wrong *her*, do *her* harm, traduce *her*, but let him spare his friend.

"I'll do it," she said aloud. The decision came to her suddenly. Self had filled her horizon before, she had considered no one else. "If I die," she told herself, "I'll yet save my friend."

Probation had given Wychthwaite his chance. Voluntarily he had made the worst of his time. If he had wanted her, she believed, he would have comported himself, at least for that term, decently. The fact that she had fled from him escaped her: that she had herself suggested some adjustment seemed an additional reason for impeachment. He had been given the opportunity to repent and he had but stepped the more surely in his own path.

"I will do it," she reiterated. She sent by Peggy a message to her husband to come to her. He returned with the servant almost at once. Zoë was raised in bed, she addressed him in English.

"I have been thinking," she began, with as bright a face as she could put on the matter, "that I have behaved very badly to you. When I wrote to Mr Jewell-Brown, I was in earnest."

She paused, but he made no remark.

"Now, if you are willing to take me," she went on, calmly, but with a heart like stone, "for my part, I'm

willing to come. When I'm well enough to go, we'll go together, won't we?" The pain she felt was dulled somewhat in comparison with the excitement. She meant to save Jewell-Brown. Wychthwaite grew red, looked awkward.

"Very well," he said without enthusiasm.

Zoë was heartily glad he made no movement to take her hand or kiss her. She wore her smile constantly, facing him. He blushed and paled in turn. "Very well," he said again, with a false intonation of pleasure. "That's settled."

He made for the door; his movement released Zoë from her obsession. She greatly desired her freedom.

"If you are willing—" she suggested. The struggle within her was equalled by the fight he waged within himself. He came back, and spoke with a more open tone.

"I'm willing, of course," he began, then more frankly yet: "We ought to be willing, Zoë, and we shall be. We'll be good friends yet."

They shook hands on this speech. Zoë thanking him. She saw how disagreeable her proposal was to him. Never surely were two people more unwilling to wed, or more anxious to do right.

When he had gone she faced the future bravely, but with so woeful a look that Peggy was dismayed.

"We go away with Mr Wychthwaite," Zoë translated for her benefit.

"Not I," cried Peggy, "for one."

"Would you desert me, Peggy?" wept Zoë.

"Not while you're mine," Peggy answered stoutly.

"Go with that fellow and say good-bye for ever to your old Peggy."

"So it must be then," said Zoë.

"I'd rather a hundred times bury you, my girl," said Peggy. "Ah, and he doesn't want you. He wants *her*. Will that change you?"

"That strengthens me," Zoë said. "Have you forgotten your religion, then?"

The word recalled prayers. Peggy knelt. Together they prayed, one weeping.

"Leave me, Peggy," Zoë commanded, "I must rest. We shall soon leave this house, now."

Tormented once more by doubts insoluble, she lay in a half doze, the prey to further ponderings.

Chapter XXXVIII

holds communion with the dead

TO her next awakening she put off the contemplation of her words to Wychthwaite. But when she woke the incident was forgotten.

Her mind tried to deal with the problem of her future. It begged for yet more time, but Zoë knew that she must decide. Before her lay two lives, one bright with joy and love, the other with nothing to lighten it. The choice was made a hundred times and each time her brain fell back from the effort of confirming it.

"I am going to my lover," she whispered to her own ears, and in the words found strength.

To the exertion of sustained thought, delirium succeeded. Faces thronged about her bed; voices joined to dissuade her or to send her on her way.

Lalage, aureolate, hung mistily before her, murmuring continually, "I'd take my happiness if I could see it. I'd take my happiness if I could see it."

"I see mine," said Zoë.

"Take it while you may," said dead Lalage.

"I am going to my lover," Zoë whispered.

Lalage's haloed face disappeared and Claire's baby prattled joyously, beating its chubby hands together, for pure delight. Zoë held out her arms, but it was too far from her grasp, and she too worn to

follow it. Its flight disturbed her, she bit her hand and wept.

"Why am I tormented?" she asked. The baby dimpled seductively. Her hands could not shut out the sight of its wistfulness. "Must I never kiss a child of mine?" sobbed poor Zoë. Motherhood was denied her. She wept herself tired, to resume her agonised survey of the ghosts that thronged her room.

The six girls of the upper class sat at needlework, she among them: she looked at them with fondness: her own hands held fine embroidery, she bent to it; soft chirrupings made her lift her head. Four of her companions held rosy children in their arms; Claire bowed her head above her child, it cried in pain. "I had rather suffer thus and even lose my little one," she said in tears, "than never to have held it to my breast." Zoë's tears were the more bitter: they washed the vision away.

Faces of men swam into view: she danced, bowed, laughed and was entirely happy: Joseph threw a wreath, someone a bunch of roses: she was bombarded with bouquets; she danced on the encumbered stage between the heaps of flowers. Relentless memory took her from that triumph to the lonely seat that faced the Campobossis. The flowers withered with the dream.

Burmance waited in the sunlight: her heart went out to him. Hands invisible held her back. She listened for words of love, and heard the idle chatter of Kitty's friends.

Dead Lalage — Burmance — Joseph — Amalia — Wychthwaite—Sister Joy—Bertrand—Brother Frederic

—Zoë watched them pass and repass. She yearned to be alone.

Brother Frederic brought prayer, Zoë prayed, vigour returned, he faded with the rest, the room was free. Ghosts dead and living alike fled exorcised by her devotion. To replace them, Mary Mother glowed in the air before her, her Child at her bosom. Zoë's lips were dumb, before her returning torment. The Holy Child smiled and held out baby arms ; Mary held Him close.

"I am going to my lover," said Zoë. The Virgin blessed her with a wave of the hand.

Again the procession passed. At every attempt to answer the question that her heart asked of her mind or that her mind asked of her heart, the phantoms came to testify for right or wrong. Merciful sleep came upon her, but at the opening of her eyes, the ghosts still waited.

Going to him was love, and love was pain ; staying was right, and right was pain. The hours of anguish that she had suffered counted as nought. She was as far from her decision as ever. There was no change. Every hour came in with torment and went out with anguish. Zoë thought years must be passing, while she wrestled within.

She was aware of no divisions of time: thought, torturing meditation, unsolved anxiety made up her world.

Chapter XXXIX

is concerned with an unhappy man

PEGGY aroused her; the servant was busying herself about the room opening drawers, folding dresses, wrapping tissue paper about laces. Zoë asked what day it was, aware that she had lost count of time. The answer dismayed her.

"The fifteenth?" she repeated. "Peggy, you can't mean it? Not the fifteenth, Peggy, not the fifteenth."

"It *is* the fifteenth," Peggy declared stoutly. The date had no associations for her.

"Am I very ill, Peggy?"

"Nearly well, my Miss," said the servant. "Well enough to go."

"Well enough to go, yes," said Zoë, she sat up prepared to rise.

"To-morrow," Peggy said.

Zoë sank back. "To-morrow," she agreed with her lips.

"You shall go," the woman went on, "and without him——"

"Him," Zoë echoed vaguely.

"That wanton's lover," Peggy cried. Not another word would she give: she tidied the room and went out.

It was nine o'clock. Until twelve Burmance awaited her. She knew he would wait beyond the last stroke of midnight—he would not lightly let hope escape.

"I will go to him at once," she said. Rising, she

locked the door and fell on her knees. Prayer strengthened her soul and calmed her. She set quietly about her slight preparations. A voice bid her good-night from outside the door: she answered civilly, holding her breath in fear lest by some chance her plan should reveal itself. Another voice, this time Kitty's, with much of contempt lingering in it, told her to sleep well. Doors closed, windows were thrown up, curtains drawn, fires mended. Zoë heard angry voices in the corridor: it was Jewell-Brown swearing at his servant, the man defending himself: his master's voice rose higher. He was exceedingly angry. Every sound died out. Zoë wearily placed the last garment in her bag. The effort of dressing herself succeeded, and proved too great for her. As she raised herself from the buttoning of her boots, she felt faint; her head was hot, her heart cold; blood roared in her ears: she lay down on the bed, half-conscious, for a moment's rest. The clocks struck eleven, a quarter past, half past; Zoë heard them vaguely through the noise of her pulses: she was too feeble to rise. She was faintly aware of movement outside her door: voices were raised for an instant: that also left her undisturbed. The clocks warned her that it was quarter to twelve. The image of Burmance, great, hopeful, patient, waiting for her, was of itself enough to give her energy; she rose, put on her cloak, drank a cordial. Wychthwaite's claim faced her; she remembered his unwillingness and could be calm. The vision of Burmance with her heart in his keeping drew her.

"I am going to my lover," she said silently. "I am going to my lover."

The house was quiet and dark; the last light, Zoë's candle, was extinguished. In the murk, with her lover's name on her lips, she unlocked the door and stood to listen. There was nothing but a footstep growing fainter in the street below. She made a step, but something stopped her foot. Terrified, she drew back, then thinking it might be Peggy, fearful to be alone and lying dog-like at the guard, she struck a light.

Clocks gave warning of their midnight effort: in the silence that followed their premonitory sound, Zoë stood to gaze on that which had barred her passage. Twelve strokes tolled the death of the day that might had given her to her lover. The clocks ceased, with never an extra note for the passing of Wychthwaite, who lay, with a knife in his throat, staring up at his wife.

Chapter XL

echoes to the chime of the vesper bell

THE Brothers of the Fraternity turned out in full force and grand array to greet the bride. Her invitation was a command, and the plea that their tunics were far from clean served them not. They were the same tunics that had adorned the wearers when they had succoured her in the past, as much the same as the true hearts that beat beneath them. So they came at her bidding, nothing loth. Royally they feasted, the whole Brotherhood, with hands gauging their rotundity, smacking their lips without let or hindrance.

Jovially they elbowed the gaily clad friends that flocked about her, hobnobbing with the highest in the land; and at the close, joyous and smiling, they returned to their abode.

Zoë watched them go, laughing with tear-filled eyes, as they pushed each other amiably about, constantly turning to wave a courteous adieu; and to each signal she replied with a smile and a bow. They were content, and she was content, and how much more was Burmance content, who stood to see her while she waved and smiled!

They closed the narrow gate of the Fraternity, shutting themselves in among the odours and sights of years. Each to his task, with a sigh for the ended delights of the day. The older Brothers trotted away,

recalling in a pleased silence the last glass of Pommery. One lingered and mused.

"What changes there have been!" said this one aloud.

The remark arrested the departing Brothers and brought them about him, staring with amaze. They made him repeat his preposterous speech, nudging each other roguishly at the close. What a silly youngster, the nudges meant: hark at him saying such things, and he only turned sixty this autumn!

"Changes?" said Brother Robert. He looked at the vine growing on the wall of the cloister; the leaves had an obedient air, hanging from the points at which he allowed them to grow. It had always looked the same, that vine. "Changes?" he repeated, "I know of none."

Brother Luke examined his door jealously: the bolt still grated as it had done when he first drew it; the key still chafed his thigh. "I also know of none," he said, and drew away from so idle a discussion.

"Changes?" mused Brother Eutychus. "Where are they?" Since he could remember, they had always had the same meals, week in, week out, at the Fraternity, and for many a long year he had been responsible for them.

"Changes," grumbled Brother Frederic; "nonsense, the confessions are always the same; all girls are alike."

They stared each one at the part of the monastery life that was entrusted to him, digesting the strange word. One by one they turned away, denying their Brother reason.

Nevertheless, Change was there—patent, palpable,

self-evident, sad. What of thy mirror, Brother Robert, if thou ownest such a gaud? Tells it not of wrinkles, the small change of the currency of Time?

Consider thy charge, O Janitor. Swings the door not heavier on its hinges? Thou shuttest it not quite so easily as of yore.

What of thy drooping head, O Brother Eutychus? Some change there, surely, from the days of adolescence.

Time was when thy step was smarter, Brother Frederic, and thy joints more supple. And the girls, my Brother, do they confess quite so much as in the days of yore?

What of your greater charity, O my Brothers, widened at length to cover every sin? The years themselves, do they not pass with a swifter speed?

Surely, surely the hand of Change is upon you, is everywhere over the wandering world. Go your appointed ways, my Brothers, down the ever steepening track of Time, and complete absolution be yours at last.

Good-night! Good-night!

Softly through the twilight steals the music of the vesper bell. Softly, for we are a-weary; softly, for the earth is dreaming; softly, for the day is done.

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